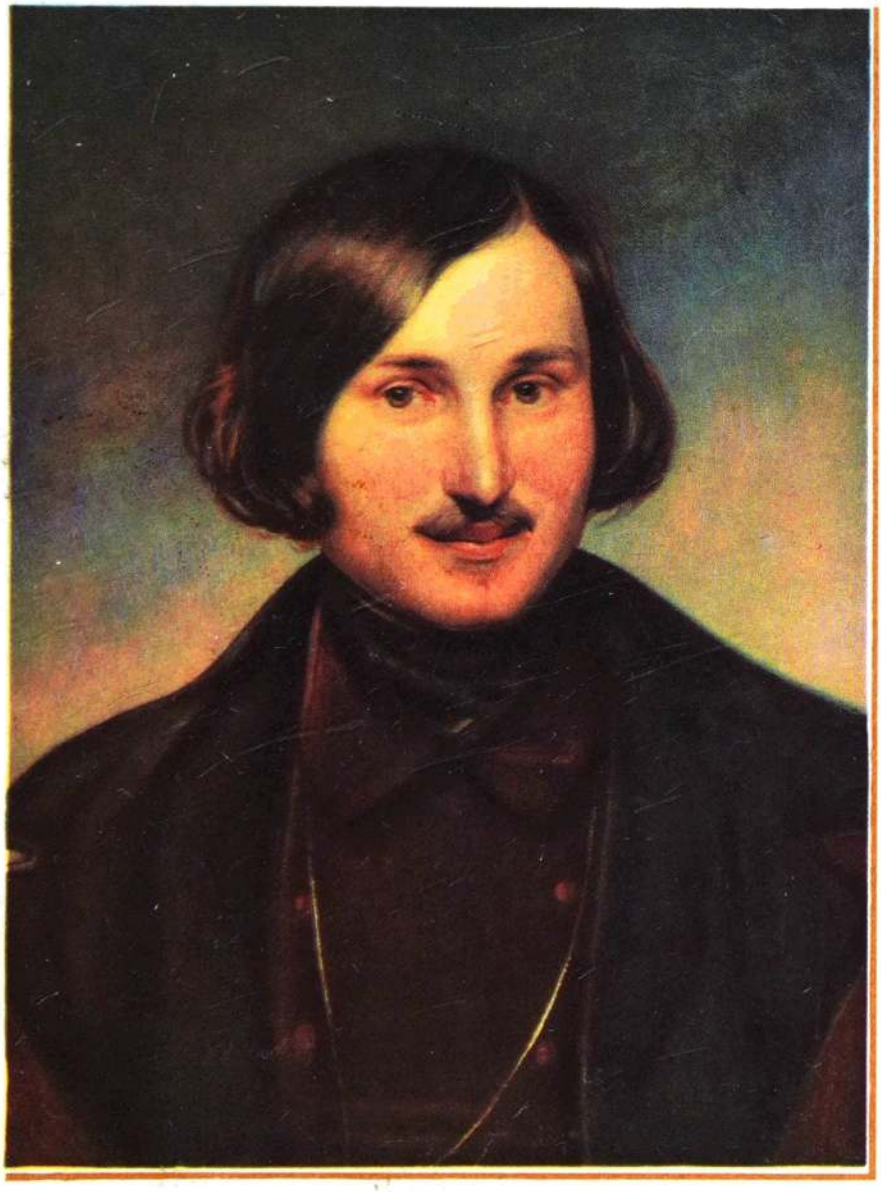
PROGRESS · RUSSIAN CLASSICS SERIES

NIKOLAI GOGOL
A Selection



Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) stands high in the pantheon of Russia's greatest writers.

"It is a long time since the world knew a writer," wrote the leader of Russian revolutionary democracy, writer and critic Nikolai Chernyshevsky, "who was of such vital importance to his nation as Gogol is to Russia... He showed us what sort of people we are, what we lack, to what we should aspire, what we should abhor and what we should love. His entire life was an impassioned struggle against ignorance and boorishness ... inspired at every moment by his sworn objective—to serve the good of his country."

Alexander Pushkin had an extremely high opinion of Gogol's work. Ivan Turgenev described Gogol as a man "whose name stands for an entire epoch in the history of our literature ... in whom we take pride as a glory to our nation".

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N. V. Gogol. Portrait by A. Venetsianov. Lithograph, 1834.

NIKOLAI GOGOL

A Selection

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Николай Гоголь
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FOREWORD

Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852)

Russian classical literature was always inspired by the ideas of humanism and social justice. For a large portion of the 19th century literature in Russia was the only legal platform for impassioned protests against the tyranny of the ruling landowning class. The great democrat and critic Vissarion Belinsky succinctly noted that Russian society regards its writers as its "only leaders, protectors and deliverers from Russian autocracy..."

The traditions of Russian satire were passed down from each successive generation of Russian writers to the next, from Kantemir to Fonvizin, via Griboyedov and Gogol to Shchedrin and Chekhov. Gogol invested the genre with new content and lent it an unprecedented depth with his artistic archetypes. His writing marked a new development and intensification of critical realism, a literary trend which expressed the protest of the enlightened section of Russian society against the chains of slavery and tyranny in which the people languished.

Gogol's works all date to the 1830s and 1840s. On December 14, 1825, Russia's first revolutionary uprising—the rising of the Decembrists—was brutally suppressed. Russia languished in the grip of the cruel forces of reaction. It seemed as though another upsurge of social and political unrest in the country could not be contemplated for decades to come. But the repressions of the tsarist government were unable to stifle the people's dreams of freedom, the "high reachings of their mind" as Pushkin put it. A mere half dozen years after the collapse of Decembrism saw the appearance of Gogol's first stories. Gogol's humour possessed an enormous

destructive power. He displayed to the "eyes of all the people" the vile and rotten nature of serfdom and the tsarist regime and at the same time reflected the people's dreams of the possibility of another, superior reality.

With Gogol's entry on the scene Russian literature acquired an heir and successor to Pushkin, it's greatest writer.

But Gogol continued Pushkin's tradition along a path of his own choosing. Pushkin expressed the contradictions of the society he lived in, but the world he created in his art was one of beauty and harmony, and his negation of the vice of reality was balanced by his affirmation of life. His candid depiction of social collision, which so often proved irreconcilable, is combined with a glorification of the might and nobility of human reason.

Pushkin embraced all aspects of Russian life, but even during his lifetime the necessity for a more critical and detailed investigation of its various aspects became apparent. Gogol's artistic world is not as universal and all-embracing as Pushkin's. Furthermore, he differed in his perception of contemporary life. Gogol's realism, like that of Pushkin, was inspired by a fearless analysis of the social phenomena of his age. However, Gogol's realism stands apart in that he attempted to express the ideal exclusively through a negation of the hideous reality he saw around him. His work is dominated by the spirit of negation.

Gogol was the first writer in Russian literature to give satire an analytical and investigative character. Thanks to this he was able in his stories to go beyond a panorama of Russian life: he revealed, so to speak, its inner "mechanism". Gogol not only depicted evil, he endeavoured to elucidate its very origins. When Gogol took up his pen, satire already had venerable traditions in Russia. But it was a didactic form of satire, concerned more with exposing particular failings of reality, than with revealing its inner essence. It proceeded from the premise that these partial shortcomings could be set right without encroaching on the mainstays of society. Gogol's satire, however, went far further, exposing the root vices of the entire social structure.

It is this that won Gogol's work recognition from enlightened Russia as a battle-standard in the struggle for a radical renewal of their life. It is this, too, that caused Belinsky to hail Gogol as "one of the great leaders" of Russia "on the path of consciousness, development, progress".

Fame came to Gogol in 1831-1832, after the publication of *Village Evenings Near Dikanka*, a colourful and entertaining book which consisted of eight stories. From its pages wafted the breath of Ukrainian folk poetry and popular song. Ukrainian by birth, Gogol was familiar with the life, mores and history of this people. His father was an educated and gifted man, who took an active interest in literature and was himself the author of

several comedies, *Village Evenings Near Dikanka* is a vivid reflection of the Ukrainian poetic spirit, with its innate benign nature and hostility towards all falsehood, its trustfulness and magnanimity. The world of Dikanka is the merry carefree world of the folk-tale, which contrasted sharply with the grim prose of the reality in which the writer lived.

However, a few years later this prose of reality found its way onto the pages of Gogol's stories.

Under the title of *Mirgorod* Gogol published a new collection of stories which were to mark the beginning of the next and most important stage in his work. Here he emerged before his readers as a writer posing crucial problems of their life with candour and anger, and boldly exposing the social contradictions of the age.

Mirgorod begins with the story "Old-World Landowners". This describes the decay of the old, patriarchal way of life. The life of the story's heroes—Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulcheria Ivanovna—flows by in peace and tranquility, and not a single one of their desires "flies beyond the palisade surrounding their small garden". Gogol pokes gentle fun at the artless existence of his heroes, whose household is in a state of desolation and decay. But at the same time he seems to be sorry for these two old dears, bound together by their patriarchal feelings, their good nature, naïveté and helplessness.

The element of realism and satire is stronger in the "Story of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich". The stupid quarrel between these two Mirgorodians forms part of a broad exposé. The life of the two Ivans entirely lacks the patriarchal simplicity and spontaneous charm of the old-world landowners; their behaviour provokes in the writer a feeling of irritation rather than a gently ironic smile: "What a dreary world we live in, gentlemen!"

In this story we can observe a significant shift from Gogol's earlier humorous tone to undisguised satire.

"Mirgorod" also includes a historical tale, "Taras Bulba".

Gogol was fascinated by the idea of a strong, heroic character, and he found such people in the history of Ukrainian popular struggle against Polish feudal lords.

The epic of the Ukrainian Cossacks, which covers more than two centuries (16th and 17th), is one of the most heroic episodes in world history. A handful of fugitives from serfdom, were, within a short period, to grow into the formidable Zaporozhian Sech, a community of freemen that ruled over a vast area along the middle and southern reaches of the Dnieper striking fear into the hearts of Turks, Tatars and the Polish nobles, all would-be encroachers on the Ukrainian soil.

The Zaporozhian Sech, as described by Gogol, is a true republic of freedom and equality, inhabited by strong courageous characters, dedicated to the interests of their own people and the independence of their native land. In the Cossack community Gogol saw a sublime democratic morality, and healthy social relations, free of venality and any slightest trace of petty-mindedness.

Each of the story's characters could be the hero of an inspired poem. But pride of place among them goes to Taras Bulba. A life full of adversity and danger is his true element. A man of enormous willpower and exceptional natural intelligence, he is movingly gentle with his comrades and merciless to the enemy. He is a mighty character, inspired with the breath of poetic legend, the very personification of his people's spiritual and moral power.

The figure of Taras stands out in bold and rugged relief. The story of Taras's tragic conflict with his younger son Andriy gives the reader a vivid insight into the Cossack's harsh inner world.

Andriy is a man of impassioned impulses. He allows himself to become hopelessly enamoured of a Polish beauty and, forgetting the interests of his comrades and the dangers threatening his people, goes over to the side of the Cossacks' enemies.

Such behaviour cannot be forgiven even the bravest of the "Cossack knights", and he is branded as a traitor.

Gogol won general acclaim with the Mirgorod cycle. Even during Pushkin's lifetime Gogol was hailed by Belinsky as Russia's first writer and the leading light in modern Russian literature. Almost simultaneously with *Mirgorod* he began publication of his so-called St. Petersburg stories. First he published a collection under the title of *Arabesques*, containing "Nevsky Prospekt", "The Portrait", and "Diary of a Madman", which were followed by "The Nose" and later "The Greatcoat". These stories are known as *St. Petersburg Stories*, because they are all set in St. Petersburg, then the capital of the Russian Empire.

Arriving in St. Petersburg as a young man of twenty from the distant provinces and with a certificate attesting his right to "the rank of the 14th class", Gogol suffered a great disillusionment. St. Petersburg was a far cry from the city of his imagination. "Everyone goes on about their departments or collegiums," he wrote home with chagrin, "everything is downtrodden and stifled under a flood of petty and futile activities..." The city struck Gogol with its picture of deep social contradiction and tragic contrasts, with its crude humiliation of man, its triumph of "seething commercialism", its atmosphere of police high-handedness. St. Petersburg, a city of all-powerful and soulless bureaucracy, was, in his words, a "granite dungeon". In

St. Petersburg Stories this "dungeon" is objectively presented as a terrible symbol of the entire feudal-bureaucratic order of Nicholas's Russia.

In his new cycle Gogol presented different archetypes from those in *Dikanka* and *Mirgorod*, and different aspects of Russia's public life. The romantic appeal of the Ukrainian past, the poetry of the folk tale and the heroism of the people's struggle, the satirical portrayal of the small-holders' lives—all this gave way to pictures replete with deep tragedy.

Never before had Gogol addressed his pen so penetratingly and mercilessly to an exposure of contemporary Russia. The entire cycle of stories reads like a cry of indignation against all those who had profaned life and rendered it inhuman. In this respect *St. Petersburg Stories* are most closely linked with Gogol's two central works—*The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls*.

The leitmotif of the St. Petersburg stories is the tragic disorder of life. Each story provides an original variation on this theme.

"The Nose" is an essay in the absurd. But a serious idea lurks behind the outwardly crazy story. In the bureaucratic system with its extraordinary toadying to rank man rates as nothing, what matters is not he himself but his rank. When Collegiate Assessor Kovalev discovers his lost nose and attempts to return it to its proper place, the nose, which, to judge by its "gold-braided uniform" and its "plumed hat" holds the rank of State Councillor, disdainfully answers his "inferior"—a mere collegiate assessor: "You are mistaken, my good sir... there cannot be any close relations between us, for to judge by the buttons on your uniform you must serve in another department." Deprived of his nose, Kovalev becomes nothing, and all his hopes of a career and a profitable marriage are utterly dashed. The story is written in the form of a grotesque. But this in no way obscures its real and caustically satirical purport.

In the story "Nevsky Prospekt" Piskarev, a talented artist, hankers after all things beautiful and sublime. But his romantic fancies are starkly contradicted by the prose of life. Piskarev falls in love with a tender poetic beauty who turns out to be a prostitute. The hero commits suicide, falling victim to "the eternal dichotomy between fancy and actuality". Whilst the dreamer is destroyed the cad and philistine lieutenant Pirogov prospers in St. Petersburg, a city of many colours.

St. Petersburg, where "everything, not only the streetlamp, exudes deceit", is the setting for the drama of another gifted artist, who falls victim to an unfortunate passion for financial gain ("The Portrait").

Another inhabitant of this city is Poprishchin, hero of "Diary of a Madman". He is poor and downtrodden. But why is the world so unjust? Why is it that "all the best things in life, they all go to the Equerries or the

generals?"—these are the questions which torment him. Which, in fact, torment other of Gogol's characters too.

Not one of them is capable of finding an answer to these questions. They go insane or perish in an unequal struggle with tragic reality.

One such victim is Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, hero of "The Greatcoat". Bashmachkin is a small man, oppressed by need. He quietly and uncomplainingly endures the jeers of his colleagues and the despotic rudeness of his bosses. The stultifying work of copying papers has paralysed any possible manifestation of spiritual life in him. Akaky Akakievich has only one dream: this is to have a new greatcoat. So he starves to save up his meagre earnings, and finally he has a new coat made. His happiness is boundless but it proves to be short-lived, for one night he is set upon and robbed of his coat. When he turns for help in a fit of despair to an "important personage" the latter does not even deign to hear what he has to say... Eventually the shock of having his dream shattered lead to Akaky Akakievich's death.

The scene at the general's is the true culmination of the story. Here we are shown in bold relief the tragedy of the "small man" in tsarist Russia. The humility and meekness of the wretched hero in contrast with the rudeness of the "important personage" evokes in the reader not only a feeling of anger at the humiliation of a human being, but also protest against the unjust order of life, which makes possible such humiliation. "The Greatcoat" is a passionate avowal of Gogol's humanism, which was to have such an enormous influence on the entire subsequent history of Russian literature. The observation ascribed to Dostoyevsky: "We all came out of Gogol's 'Greatcoat' ", is an exact, although allegorical expression of Gogol's importance in the development of the most progressive traditions of Russian realism.

St. Petersburg Stories show Gogol as a merciless satirist of his society. It was a straight path, as we have already noted, that led from here to *The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls*.

First performed in St. Petersburg in 1836, *The Government Inspector* was something the like of which had not been seen on the Russian stage. No one before Gogol had shown with such deadly persuasion the process of decay of the autocratic regime and its corrupt state apparatus. Behind the gallery of petty civil servants depicted in the play lurks the figure of the nation's top "civil servant"—Tsar Nicholas I. The assemblage of petty grafters act as an onimous symbol of the entire state apparatus. It is not to be wondered at that the tsar, as he left his box after the première of *The Government Inspector*, dropped the comment:

"Hmm, what a play! Gets at everyone, and most of all at me!" The

nation's tyrant felt the destructive power of Gogol's "diabolical laughter" and recognized in him his mortal enemy.

Gogol's satire acquires even greater archetypal force in his immortal poem *Dead Souls*. Russian literature had never before known a work which examined the most important problems of the feudal, landowning society in such all-embracing breadth. The predatory and acquisitive Chichikov, the bizarre assemblage of landowners, the provincial officials—they are all, taken together or in isolation, a typical expression of this reality. "You could go quite mad," wrote Alexander Herzen, "looking at this menagerie of gentryfolk and officials, creeping about in the deepest gloom, buying and selling the 'dead souls' of peasants."

Each successive generation discovers new archetypal images in Gogol's works, which point to important phenomena in their own lives. Such is the power of all great works of art. They outlive their creators and their age, transcend national boundaries and become humanity's eternal companions.

The name of Gogol has long since taken its place alongside that of Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe and Balzac in the pantheon of world culture. His works have been translated into many languages. The English and the French consider *The Government Inspector* their own national play, and I have myself observed the tremendous success of this comedy with the audiences of London and Paris.

Dead Souls and Gogol's other prose works have had an even wider resonance. Assessing the place occupied by Gogol in human culture the Danish critic Georg Brandes wrote, addressing himself to Russian writers: "Thanks to Gogol, the creator of the school of true realism, you have outstripped the rest of Europe in your literature."

However many years divide us from Gogol we will never cease to marvel at the depth and perfection of his works, and neither will we ever regard our view of him as exhaustive. The great creations of the human mind are inexhaustible. Each successive age re-reads the classics and discovers in them new and hitherto unnoticed facets.

With their merciless exposure of the various forms of social evil and injustice Gogol's works also affirm the exalted principles of humanism. These works are a pure font of poetry. Drinking of it the reader absorbs noble moral ideas and in the process he too becomes a purer and better person.

Professor Sergei Mashinsky,
Doctor of Philology

From MIRGOROD

OLD-WORLD LANDOWNERS

I have a particular soft spot for the quiet life of those proprietors of remote estates, who in the Ukraine are usually called old-world landowners. They are like nice tumbledown cottages, picturesque and brightly coloured, and the exact opposite of those smooth modern buildings, whose walls are as yet unwashed by the rain, whose roots are still bare of moss and whose plaster still intact and not revealing patches of brick on their porches. I sometimes like to immerse myself for a while in this extraordinarily isolated world, where no desire is strong enough to take its possessor beyond the palisade of his little yard, beyond the fence around his garden, filled with apple and plum trees, beyond the village huts which surround it, leaning askew in the shade of willows, elders and pear-trees. The life of their modest owners is so quiet, so utterly quiet, that for a moment you can lose yourself and imagine that the passions, desires and anxieties engendered by some evil spirit, which agitate the world, do not exist at all, and that you only saw them in some resplendent and dazzling dream. From here I see a low house with a gallery supported by small, blackened wooden pillars, which runs right around the house, making it possible during thunder and hail storms to batten down the shutters without getting wet. Beyond it I see a fragrant bird cherry, rows and rows of low fruit trees, doused in the purple of cherries and a ruby sea of plums dusted with fur; a spreading maple, in the shade of which a carpet has been laid out; before the house stretches a spacious enclosure covered with short, dewy grass, across which lies a well-tramped path, leading from the barn to the kitchen and from the kitchen to

the house proper; a long-necked goose drinking water with its newly-hatched, fluffy goslings; a palisade, festooned with bunches of dried pears and apples and over which carpets have been spread for airing; a cart laden with watermelons standing beside the barn; its draught ox, freed from its harness, lazying beside the cart—for me this all has an inexplicable charm, perhaps because I no longer see all these things about me, and we treasure everything from which we have been parted. Be that as it may, I used to feel a warm glow of contentment spread over my soul when I drove up to such homesteads; the horses would merrily clip-clop up to the porch, where the coachman alighted in the most leisurely fashion from his box and filled his pipe, as if he had arrived at his own home; even the phlegmatic barking of mongrels of all shapes and sizes was as music to my ears. But best of all I liked the actual tenants of these modest little nooks, the old folks who came fussing out to meet me. Even now, in the midst of the whirling of fashionable tailcoats I sometimes see their faces in my mind's eye, and suddenly a wave of reverie wafts over me as I succumb to shimmering memories of the past. Their faces are always eloquent of such kindness, such warmth and candour, that it forces you to abandon, for at least a while, all audacious flights of thought, and to lapse imperceptibly and utterly into that earthy, bucolic way of life.

To this day I cannot forget two old inhabitants of a bygone age, who, alas! are no longer with us, but my heart still fills with sorrow and I feel a void within me when I remember that now, as I pass by their old home, I will see a scene of desolation, a collection of derelict huts, a pond choked with weeds, and an overgrown moat where once their little house had stood, and nothing else.

It is so sad, I feel sad already! But let us return to our story.

Afanasy Ivanovich Tovstogub and his wife Pulcheria Ivanovna, or Tovstogubikha as the local people used to call her, were the two old people I was talking about. Had I been a painter wishing to portray Philemon and Baucis, I could not have found better models for my portrait than this pair. Afanasy Ivanovich was sixty and Pulcheria Ivanovna fifty-five. Afanasy Ivanovich was a tall man, invariably dressed in a camlet coat with a sheepskin lining, and was always to be found hunched in a chair with a smile on his lips, telling some

story or listening. Pulcheria Ivanovna was of a somewhat serious disposition, and hardly ever smiled; but her face and eyes bespoke such kindliness, such willingness to offer you the best things they had, that you would be sure to find a smile too sweet for her kindly face. The wrinkles on their faces were so gentle and so charmingly arranged that an artist would wish to record them exactly on his canvas. In them you could read the entire story of their lives, the cloudless and tranquil existence of the old landed gentry, simple-hearted but wealthy folk, and not to be likened to those mean Ukrainians who begin as tar merchants and hawkers, and are to be found in swarms in council chambers and government offices, who squeeze every kopeck they can out of their fellow countrymen, flood St. Petersburg with denunciations, finally amass a fortune and solemnly add the letter *v* onto their names, to disguise their Ukrainian origins. No, like all members of the old Ukrainian landed classes, they were not to be compared with these wretched and despicable creatures.

You could not but be moved to gaze on their love for one another. They never addressed one another by their first names alone but always used the politest forms of address: Yes, Afanasy Ivanovich. No, Pulcheria Ivanovna. "Did you go through the seat of the chair, Afanasy Ivanovich?" "I did, Pulcheria Ivanovna, but don't be cross." They had never had any children, and thus all their affection had been focussed on one another. Long ago, in his youth, Afanasy Ivanovich had seen some active service, had risen to the rank of acting-major, but all this was so long ago that Afanasy Ivanovich no longer even recalled it. Afanasy Ivanovich had married when he was thirty, at the time a young buck in a braided uniform; he had even rather adroitly abducted Pulcheria Ivanovna, whose parents had not wished him to marry her; but he did not even remember very much about this either, or at least never spoke of it.

All these distant and remarkable events had long ago been transformed or supplanted by their tranquil and isolated life, by those drowsy and yet harmonious dreams which waft over you too as you sit on the balcony of their country house looking out into the garden, listening to the lush noise of the rain slapping against the leaves, forming murmuring streams and sending a drowsiness through all your limbs, while a rain-

bow steals out from behind the trees and in a broken arch spills its seven pastel shades across the sky. These are the dreams to which you are lulled by the carriage rolling between the green copses, while the steppe quail sings its song, and the fragrance of the grass mingled with the scent of the corn and wild flowers seeps through the carriage door, pleasantly brushing against your hands and face.

He always sat and listened to his guests with a pleasant smile, sometimes talked himself, but for the most part preferring to ask questions. He was not one of those old men who become tiresome with their interminable praise of the good old days and disapproval of things modern. On the contrary, he would ask all sorts of questions, demonstrating great curiosity and personal concern for the circumstances of your own life, for your successes and failures, which good-natured old people are always anxious to hear about, even though their curiosity is a little like that of a small child who stares at the seal of your pocketwatch while talking to you. At such times his face positively radiated bonhomie.

The rooms of our old couple's house were small and low, as are usually found in these old-world homes. Each room had its own enormous stove, taking up almost a third of the floor space. The rooms were terribly warm, because Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulcheria Ivanovna both loved the warmth. All the stoves were fuelled from the front porch, which was always stacked almost to the ceiling with straw, the usual substitute for firewood in the Ukraine. The crackle of this burning straw and the light it gave off makes the porch particularly comforting on a winter's evening, when, chilled to the bone after pursuing some fair village damsel, the hot-blooded young owner runs into the warmth, clapping his hands with pleasure. The walls of the rooms were hung with a few paintings and little pictures in narrow, old-fashioned frames. I am convinced that the owners themselves had long forgotten what they depicted, and that if you had removed some of them they would never even have noticed. There were two large portraits, painted in oils. One depicted some church dignitary, the other Peter III. From the narrow frame of another peered the fly-blown features of Countess Lavalier. Around the windows and above the doors hung a large number of small pictures, which one eventually came to regard as mere spots on the wall and thus no longer

noticed. The floor in almost all the rooms was of earth, but ever so smoothly pressed and kept cleaner than the parquet floors of many a rich mansion, indolently swept by some sleepy gentleman servant dressed in livery.

Wherever you looked in Pulcheria Ivanovna's room there were trunks and chests, large and small. Hanging all over the walls were sacks and bags containing seeds—flower-seeds, vegetable-seeds, watermelon seeds. Innumerable balls of wool of different colours, scraps of material from garments sewn fully half a century before, were stacked and folded away in the corners of the trunks and between the trunks. Pulcheria Ivanovna was a great hoarder and collected everything without the least notion what she would ever use it for.

But the most remarkable feature of the house was its singing doors. From the first light of dawn the house would be filled with the singing of the doors. I cannot myself say what made them sing: perhaps the rusty hinges were to blame, or perhaps the carpenter who fitted them had concealed some secret mechanism in them; but what was really marvellous was the way each door had its own voice. The door leading to the bedroom sang in a thin treble; the door to the dining room possessed a hoarse bass; but that in the front porch emitted a strange tremulous sort of moan which, if you listened carefully, sounded for all the world like: "Heavens, am I freezing!" I know that a lot of people do not like this noise, but personally I am very fond of it and if here I ever happen to hear a creaking door I am at once transported back to the country, to a low-ceilinged room, illuminated by a candle in an ancient candlestick, a table set for dinner, a dark May night looking in from the garden through the wide-open window onto the table laden with food, the song of the nightingale flooding the garden, house and the distant river, the timorous rustling of the branches... and Lord! what a long train of memories files through my mind!

The chairs in the room were of wood, of the massive proportions popular in the old days; they all had tall, carved backs and were of natural wood, with neither paint nor varnish; they were not even upholstered and in a way even reminded one of the chairs on which to this day bishops sit. Three-cornered tables stood in the corners, rectangular tables before the sofa and the mirror whose fine gold frame was orna-

mented with fly-spotted carved leaves, on the floor by the sofa lay a carpet with a floral pattern in which flowers looked like birds and birds like flowers—and there you have practically all the furnishings of the unpretentious abode of my old people.

The maids' room was filled with young and not so young wenches in striped skirts, whom Pulcheria Ivanovna sometimes busied with bits of sewing or set to cleaning berries, but who spent most of their time slipping into the kitchen and sleeping. Pulcheria Ivanovna regarded it her duty to keep them in the house and to maintain strict supervision over their moral conduct. But never a few months would pass without one of them, to their mistress's great astonishment, becoming noticeably thicker in the waist, and this all the more surprising for the almost total absence of any young fellows in the house, with the possible exception of the houseboy, who slopped about in a grey half-coat and bare feet, and when he was not eating was sure to be sleeping certainly. Pulcheria Ivanovna would usually berate the malefactress, and severely punish her to ensure that this would be a lesson to others. The window panes rang to the buzzing of a terrible multitude of flies, drowned by the rich bass of a bumble-bee and with the occasional accompaniment of the piercing trill of wasps; but the moment the candles were brought out all these folk retired to bed, spreading over the entire ceiling in a black cloud.

Afanasy Ivanovich did not overburden himself with household duties, although he did occasionally ride out to see the mowers and reapers, and would carefully watch them work; the entire burden of management rested on Pulcheria Ivanovna. Pulcheria Ivanovna's housekeeping consisted in an incessant opening and closing of the pantry, in salting, drying and preserving untold quantities of fruits and plants. Her house was exactly like a chemist's laboratory. A fire burnt permanently beneath the apple tree and the tripod was hardly ever without its cauldron or bronze basin filled with jam, jelly, marshmallow, made with honey, sugar and I don't remember what else. Beneath another tree the coachman was forever at work over a brass alembic concocting infusions of vodka and peach leaves, bird-cherry blossom, knapweed, cherry stones, and towards the end of this process was quite unable to control his tongue and started prating such nonsense that Pulcheria Ivanovna had no idea what he was on about, whereupon he

retired to the kitchen to sleep. All this stuff was preserved and salted and dried in such vast quantities that it would eventually have swallowed up the entire household, because Pulcheria Ivanovna liked to prepare reserve stocks in addition to those intended for consumption, had not the greater part of it been devoured by the house maids, who would sneak into the pantry and there so gorge themselves that they spent the rest of the day groaning and complaining of stomach-aches.

Pulcheria Ivanovna had little opportunity to watch over the crops and other farm activities. The bailiff, who was in cahoots with the headman, mercilessly robbed the old couple. They were accustomed to regarding their employers' forest as their own, and regularly plundered timber to make sleighs which they sold at a nearby fair; worse still, they sold all the biggest oaktrees to neighbouring Cossacks as timber for their mills. Only once did Pulcheria Ivanovna ever attempt to inspect her forests. For this purpose a droshky team, which had once served in the local constabulary, was harnessed, the carriage decked out with enormous leather aprons which, the moment the coachman flicked the reins and the droshky moved off, at once filled the air with a cacophony of strange sounds, like tambourines, flutes and drums. Every nail and iron bracket gave off such a ringing and rattling that the mistress's departure could be heard at the mills, even though they were a good two versts from the house. Pulcheria Ivanovna could not but notice the fearful devastation of the forest and the absence of the oaktrees which she had known to be hundreds of years old even in her childhood.

"How is it, Nichipor," she asked, addressing herself to her bailiff who accompanied her, "that the oaks are so few and far between? You watch that the same thing doesn't happen to your hair!"

"Few and far between?" the bailiff replied. "They all died! Died, the lot of them: some were struck by lightning, and the worms got at them—they died, ma'am, the lot of them."

Pulcheria Ivanovna was entirely content with this explanation and on her return home gave orders for extra watchmen to be put over the black cherry-trees and the large winter pears.

Those worthy managers, the bailiff and the headman, found it quite unnecessary to cart all the flour into their

master's barns, and decided that the master and mistress would find half the amount quite adequate; even this half would be moulded or damp, being that which was rejected at the fair. But however much the bailiff and headman stole, however much was eaten by staff and livestock, beginning with the housekeeper and ending with the pigs, who disposed of fearful quantities of plums and apples and often even butted the tree with their snouts to knock down a whole rain of fruits, however much was pecked by the sparrows and crows, however much was carried away by every member of the household staff as presents to relatives in neighbouring villages, taking even cloth and yarn from the barns, the proceeds from which all made their way to a common destination, namely, the local tavern, however much was stolen by visitors, phlegmatic coachmen and footmen, the blessed earth produced such an abundance of everything, and Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulcheria Ivanovna were so modest in their needs that all this terrible plunder passed entirely unnoticed in their housekeeping.

Both old people, as is customary with old-world landowners, were extremely fond of their food. The moment it began to dawn (they were early risers) and the doors commenced their cacophonous recital, they would be seated at their table drinking coffee. After having his fill of coffee Afanasy Ivanovich would step out into the porch and flapping his handkerchief say: "Shoo! Off the porch with you, geese!" His bailiff would usually attend him in the yard. He would then enter into conversation with him, asking him in great detail about his work, and making comments and giving orders which would have astounded anyone for the extraordinary knowledge of farming that they displayed, and no novice would ever even contemplate stealing anything from such a perspicacious master. But his bailiff was an old bird and he knew the right answers to make, and better still, he knew how to manage affairs.

After this Afanasy Ivanovich would return inside and approaching Pulcheria Ivanovna suggest: "Well, Pulcheria Ivanovna, perhaps it's time for a little something to eat?"

"What would you like, Afanasy Ivanovich? Perhaps some short-cakes and bacon, or poppy seed rolls, or what about some salted mushrooms?"

"Well, perhaps I'll have some of the mushrooms, or maybe the rolls," Afanasy Ivanovich would answer, and suddenly on the table there would appear a table cloth, laid with rolls and mushrooms.

An hour before lunch Afanasy Ivanovich would have another snack, downing a measure of vodka from an antique silver cup, chasing it with mushrooms, an assortment of dried fish and such like. They sat down to their lunch at twelve o'clock. In addition to the dishes and sauce boats the table groaned beneath a mass of jars with sealed lids, to stop the appetizing aromas of old-world cooking escaping from them. The meal was usually accompanied by conversation on subjects of a prandial nature.

"It seems to me that this buckwheat," Afanasy Ivanovich would begin, "is a little burnt; would you not agree, Pulcheria Ivanovna?"

"No, Afanasy Ivanovich, try putting a little more butter in it and it won't appear burnt, or take some of this mushroom sauce in it."

"Perhaps I will, too," replied Afanasy Ivanovich, holding forward his plate: "Let's see what it's like."

After lunch Afanasy Ivanovich would retire for an hour's nap, after which Pulcheria Ivanovna would bring him a sliced watermelon and say: "Try this, Afanasy Ivanovich, such a good watermelon."

"Just because it's red in the middle does not mean it's good, Pulcheria Ivanovna," Afanasy Ivanovich would caution, taking a generous slice.

But the watermelon would be devoured without fail. After this Afanasy Ivanovich would eat a few more pears and set off for a walk around the garden in the company of Pulcheria Ivanovna. On their return to the house Pulcheria Ivanovna would set about her own affairs while her spouse sat outside on the porch, looking out into the garden, watching the pantry by turns revealing and concealing its interior, and the maids bumping into one another as they bore thither large quantities of God-knows-what in wooden crates, troughs, sieves and other fruit containers. After a little while he would send for Pulcheria Ivanovna or make his way to her himself and say: "What could I have to eat, Pulcheria Ivanovna?"

"What would you like?" she would ask, "Should I go and

tell them to bring you the dumplings with cherries I specially had set aside for you?"

"That would be fine," answered Afanasy Ivanovich.

"Or perhaps you'd like some jelly?"

"That would be rather good too," replied Afanasy Ivanovich. Whereupon all this would be served up, and, as was right and proper, consumed.

Before supper Afanasy Ivanovich would partake of another little snack. Then at half past nine they would sit down to their supper. Directly after this they would retire to bed and silence would descend on this busy, but tranquil nook. The room in which Afanasy Ivanovich and Pulcheria Ivanovna slept, was so warm that few people would have been able to stand it for long. But Afanasy Ivanovich, for the sake of the extra warmth, even used to sleep on the stove, although the fierce heat often forced him to rise several times during the night and walk around the room. Occasionally, on these promenades about the room, Afanasy Ivanovich would emit groans.

This caused Pulcheria Ivanovna to ask: "Why are you groaning, Afanasy Ivanovich?"

"The Lord only knows, Pulcheria Ivanovna, my stomach seems to be aching a little," Afanasy Ivanovich replied.

"Perhaps you should have something to eat, Afanasy Ivanovich?"

"Well, I don't know, Pulcheria Ivanovna, is it a good idea? What is there to eat, in fact?"

"Some curds, or perhaps stewed pears in their juice?"

"Well, perhaps I will have a little taste," said Afanasy Ivanovich.

A sleepy maid would be dispatched to forage in the cupboards and Afanasy Ivanovich would put away a plateful; after this he would usually announce: "I do seem to feel a bit better now."

Sometimes, if it was a bright day and the rooms were nice and warm, Afanasy Ivanovich would become frolicsome and like to pull Pulcheria Ivanovna's leg, talking about quite irrelevant things.

"What, Pulcheria Ivanovna," he would enquire, "if our house suddenly burned down, where would we go?"

"Now God forbid!" exclaimed Pulcheria Ivanovna, crossing herself.

"Well just supposing that our house did burn down, where would we then go and live?"

"The Lord only knows what you're saying, Afanasy Ivanovich! How could our house possibly burn down, God would not allow it."

"But what if it did?"

"Well, then we'd move into the kitchen. For a while you could take over the room where the housekeeper lives."

"And what if the kitchen burnt down too?"

"Now God preserve us from such calamity, that both the house and the kitchen burn down! In that case we'd have to move into the pantry, until the new house was built."

"And what if the pantry burnt down?"

"The Lord only knows what you're saying! I won't hear any more of it! It's sinful to say such things, and God will punish you for it!"

But Afanasy Ivanovich, pleased with his little bit of fun at Pulcheria Ivanovna's expense, smiled as he relaxed in his chair.

But my old people were at their most interesting when entertaining visitors. At such times the house was entirely transformed. These good people, you could see, lived for their guests. All the best things in the house were brought out for them. They vied with each other to press on you all the produce of their farm. But what I found most pleasing was the way all this hospitality was entirely natural and unaffected. Their eagerness and friendliness were combined with an expression of such meekness that you could not help but acquiesce to their offers. These were born out of the pure and radiant simplicity of their good, ingenuous hearts. This cordiality was not to be confused with that extended to you by the functionary of some treasury office, whose career has been made thanks to your efforts, and who describes you as his benefactor and crawls at your feet. The guest was never allowed to depart that same day and was inevitably prevailed upon to stop the night.

"How on earth can you set off on such a distant journey at this late hour!" Pulcheria Ivanovna would protest (the said visitor living a distance of some three or four versts away).

"Of course," Afanasy Ivanovich would concur, "you never

know what might happen: you might be attacked by robbers or some other evil-doers."

"May God protect us from robbers!" Pulcheria Ivanovna would say. "And you shouldn't say such things at night. Robbers or no robbers, it's not a good idea to be travelling in this dark night. And as for your coachman, I know your coachman, he's so small and puny that any young filly could knock him over, and anyway now he's sure to have got himself tipsy and gone to sleep somewhere."

And the visitor would be forced to stay; but, I might say, the evening in the warm, low room, the friendly, warming and soporific conversation, the steam rising from the always nourishing and skilfully prepared food laid out on the table, all this will be a reward for him. Even now I can see Afanasy Ivanovich curled up in his chair with his eternal smile, listening to his guest with attention and even delight. Often the conversation would turn on politics too. The guest, who like them rarely ventures forth from his village, expounds his theories with a significant air and, a conspiratorial expression on his face, tells them that the Frenchman has made a secretive agreement with the Englishman to throw Bonaparte back against Russia, or simply warns them of the forthcoming war, whereupon Afanasy Ivanovich, avoiding Pulcheria Ivanovna's eye, announces:

"I'm thinking of volunteering myself—and why should I not go to war too?"

"There he goes again!" interrupts Pulcheria Ivanovna. "Don't listen to him," she advises their guest. "What war, at his age! The very first soldier will shoot him! As true as God, he'll shoot him! Just take aim and shoot him."

"Let him," says Afanasy Ivanovich: "I'll shoot him too."

"Just listen to him!" exclaims Pulcheria Ivanovna: "Off to the wars, I ask you! His pistols have rusted long ago and are lying in the closet. You should see them! If you tried to shoot with them they would blow up with the gunpowder. He'd blow off his hands and disfigure his face and be a cripple for life!"

"In that case," says Afanasy Ivanovich, "I'll buy myself new weapons. I'll take a sabre or a Cossack's lance."

"It's all just talk. He says the first things that comes into his head," complains Pulcheria Ivanovna. "Mind you, I know he's joking, but I still don't like listening to it. He's always saying

this sort of thing, you listen and listen and sometimes you get quite scared."

But Afanasy Ivanovich, pleased to have given Pulcheria Ivanovna a bit of a scare, laughs, hunched on his chair.

I found Pulcheria Ivanovna most entrancing when she was offering her guest something to eat. "Now this," she would say, taking a cork from a decanter, "is vodka which has been tinctured with yarrow and sage. If you have a pain in your shoulder blades or in the small of your back this is just the thing. That's an infusion of knapweed; if you have a ringing in the ears or shingles on your face you'll find it a great help. And this one has been infused from peach pips, take a glass of it, hasn't it got a lovely smell? If you should bump your head against the cupboard or table when getting out of bed and get a lump on your forehead the best thing to do is to drink a glass of this before dinner—it'll simply vanish, just as if it had never been there." This would be followed by a similar inventory of the contents of other decanters, nearly all of which had certain curative properties. Having pressed all this prophylactica on her guest she would lead him to a mass of plates. "You must try these mushrooms with wild thyme; these are with cloves and nuts; I learnt how to salt them from a Turkish woman, in the days when we had Turkish prisoners. She was such a nice lady and you wouldn't have known she professed the Turkish faith. To look at her you would have thought she was one of us except that she didn't eat pork, she said they had some law against it. Now these are mushrooms with blackcurrent leaves and nutmeg. And those are grass mushrooms, this is the first time I've ever tried marinating them, and I don't know what they're like, I learnt the secret from Father Ivan. First you have to spread oak leaves around a tub and then sprinkle on pepper and saltpetre and put on some of those flowers that you get on goose-grass. You take those flowers and spread them face down. And those over there are pies! pies with cheese! Poppy seed cakes! and these are Afanasy Ivanovich's favourites, with cabbage and buckwheat."

"Yes," added Afanasy Ivanovich: "I'm particularly fond of them; they're soft and a wee bit sour."

In general Pulcheria Ivanovna was in top spirits when entertaining guests. Such a kindhearted lady, she would totally dedicate herself to her guests. I loved to visit them, and

although I would always stuff myself terribly like all their guests, and although all this was very bad for me, I still greatly enjoyed visiting them. I sometimes even wonder if the very air in the Ukraine does not have some special property which assists the process of digestion, because if anyone here attempted to gorge himself in a similar fashion he would most certainly find himself not in bed but spread out on the table afterwards.

What a kindhearted couple! But my tale is nearing a most saddening occurrence which was to change for ever the life of this quiet nook. This occurrence will seem all the more remarkable for the fact that it was provoked by the most trivial incident. But by the contrary order of things, paltry reasons always underlie great events and, vice versa, great undertakings end with trifling consequences. Some conqueror might gather together all the forces of his nation, wage war for several years, his generals earn acclaim, and in the end it all results in the acquisition of a scrap of earth on which there is hardly room for a potato patch; and occasionally, by contrast, two sausage merchants in neighbouring towns will have a fight over some trifle and in the end the quarrel will embrace both their towns, and then all the countryside around them and ultimately the entire nation. But we will abandon these reflections, which are diverting us from the course of our story. And besides, I do not like reflection just for the sake of reflection.

Pulcheria Ivanovna had a grey cat which liked best of all to lie at her feet rolled up in a ball. Pulcheria Ivanovna sometimes stroked it and scratched its neck with her finger, at which the spoilt animal would stretch forth its head in pleasure. It would not be true to say that Pulcheria Ivanovna was too fond of it: she had merely formed an attachment to the cat, having grown used to seeing it constantly round the house. Afanasy Ivanovich used to make little jokes about this attachment.

"I simply do not know, Pulcheria Ivanovna, what it is you see in that cat. What do you want it for? If you had taken a dog it would be a different matter: a dog can go hunting with you, but what is the good of a cat?"

"Now you keep quiet, Afanasy Ivanovich," Pulcheria Ivanovna would reply: "You like talking to no purpose. Dogs are dirty animals, making messes everywhere, while a cat is a gentle creature who will never do any harm to anyone."

Actually, Afanasy Ivanovich could not care less either way; he would only be saying all this to pull Pulcheria Ivanovna's leg.

Beyond their garden stood a large forest which had been entirely spared the ravages of the enterprising bailiff, perhaps because the noise of the axe would have carried to Pulcheria Ivanovna's ears. It was dense and neglected, its ancient trunks covered with overgrown hazel bushes making them look like the shaggy legs of pigeons. This forest was inhabited by wild cats. Wild forest cats are not to be confused with their mettlesome urban brothers prowling about the rooftops. Despite their pugnacious manner their urban life makes them much more civilized than the forest-dwellers. These latter by contrast are for the most part a wild and sombre lot; they are always lean and hungry-looking and stalk about, mewing in a coarse and untrained voice. They sometimes burrow their way right into barns and steal pork fat, even turning up in the kitchens, suddenly springing in through an open window when they observe the cook going out to answer the call of nature. They are total strangers to any form of noble sentiment; they prey on little sparrows, strangling them in their very nests. These cats met Pulcheria Ivanovna's meek little puss in the tunnel under the barn, where after sniffing each other for a long time they finally lured her out in the way a unit of soldiers might lure a foolish peasant lass. Pulcheria Ivanovna noticed the disappearance of the cat, sent the servants to look for it, but without success. Three days passed; Pulcheria Ivanovna at first missed the cat, and then forgot about it altogether. Then one day, whilst inspecting her vegetable garden and returning with an armful of fresh green cucumbers for Afanasy Ivanovich that she had picked herself, her ears were assailed by a most pitiable mewing. Instinctively she called out: "Puss, puss!" and next thing her grey cat appeared out of the gorse bushes, lean and hungry looking; it was clear that for the last God knows how many days it had not had a bite to eat. Pulcheria Ivanovna continued calling it, but the cat stood where it was, mewing and afraid to go any closer; it was clear that it had grown completely wild since it ran away. Pulcheria Ivanovna stepped forward, still calling to the cat, which timidly followed her right up to the fence. Finally, seeing its old familiar haunts it entered the room. Pulcheria Ivanovna at once ordered it to

be given some milk and meat and, sitting down before it watched delighted as her poor pet eagerly devoured piece after piece of meat and lapped up the milk. The grey fugitive seemed to grow fatter before her very eyes, and started eating less greedily. She stretched out her hand to stroke it, but the ungrateful beast was already too accustomed to the company of its wild brothers, or perhaps it held to the romantic adage that love is blind to riches—and its new fellows were certainly as poor as churchmice; whatever the reason, it leapt out of the window and none of the servants was able to catch it.

The old lady fell to thinking: "It was my death coming to fetch me!" she pronounced to herself, and nothing would dispel her fears. All that day she was downcast. Afanasy Ivanovich's jokes were all in vain and neither was he able to ascertain what had made her so sad: Pulcheria Ivanovna was non-committal, or gave replies that in no way satisfied Afanasy Ivanovich. The following day she was noticeably thinner.

"What is the matter, Pulcheria Ivanovna? You're not ailing, I hope?"

"No, I'm not ill, Afanasy Ivanovich! I want to tell you a remarkable thing that's happened: I know that I shall die this summer; death has already come to fetch me!"

Afanasy Ivanovich's mouth twisted piteously. But he resolved to suppress the feeling of sadness in his breast and, forcing a smile, said: "God only knows what you're saying, Pulcheria Ivanovna! You must have drunk some peach vodka instead of that medicinal decoction you're always drinking."

"No, Afanasy Ivanovich, I did not drink any peach vodka," said Pulcheria Ivanovna.

And Afanasy Ivanovich felt sorry that he had thus made fun of Pulcheria Ivanovna, and as he looked at her a tear formed on his eyelashes.

"I ask you to carry out my wishes," said Pulcheria Ivanovna. "When I die bury me next to the church fence. Put on me my plain dress, the one with the small flowers against a brown background. Don't put me in the silk dress, the one with the crimson stripes: when I'm dead I won't need a pretty dress. What will I want it for? But it will come in useful to you: you can have it made into an evening robe so that when you have guests you can look smart."

"The Lord only knows what you are saying, Pulcheria Ivanovna!" expostulated Afanasy Ivanovich: "Death will come one day, but why are you scaring me now by saying these things?"

"No, Afanasy Ivanovich, I know when my death will come. But I do not wish you to grieve for me: I am already an old woman, and I have had my share of life, and you're old too, so we'll soon see each other in the next world."

But by now Afanasy Ivanovich was sobbing like a child.

"It is a sin to cry, Afanasy Ivanovich! Don't sin and don't anger God with your sorrow. I'm not sorry that I'm dying. I'm only sorry about one thing" (and here her speech was interrupted by a deep sigh)—"I'm only sorry that I don't know who to leave you to, who will look after you when I die. You are like a small child: you need to be loved." When she said this her face took on such an expression of deep, devastatingly sincere pity that I doubt even the most cold-hearted of us would have been able to look at her unmoved at that moment.

"Look here, Yavdokha," she said to the housekeeper, whom she had sent for: "when I die I want you to look after the master, to cherish him like the apple of your own eye, like your very own child. Make sure that they cook his favourite dishes in the kitchen. See that you always give him clean clothes and linen; that when guests come you dress him properly or otherwise he would go out in his old gown, because even now he often forgets when it's a special day and when an ordinary one. Don't take your eyes off him, Yavdokha, I will pray for you in the next world and God will reward you. And do not forget, Yavdokha, that you are already old, you don't have long to live and don't burden your soul with sin. If you do not look after him as I have asked you you will find no happiness in this life. I personally will ask God to ensure that you meet a troubled end. You will be unhappy, and your children will be unhappy, and all your family will be deprived of the blessing of God."

The poor old dear! At that time she was thinking not of the great moment which awaited her, nor of her soul, nor of the afterlife; she was thinking of her poor companion, with whom she had passed her life and whom she was leaving orphaned and helpless. She made all the necessary arrangements with great dispatch so that Afanasy Ivanovich would not notice her

absence after she had gone. She was so firmly convinced of her approaching end and her heart was so set on it, that, indeed, a few days later she retired to her bed unable to take any more food. Afanasy Ivanovich became the very embodiment of attentiveness, and never left her bedside. "Perhaps you would take something to eat, Pulcheria Ivanovna?" he would enquire, looking anxiously into her eyes. But Pulcheria Ivanovna made no answer. Finally, after a long silence, as if wishing to say something, she moved her lips—and her ghost departed.

Afanasy Ivanovich was completely stunned. It struck him as so strange that he did not even cry. He stared at her with cloudy eyes, as if not taking in the meaning of her dead body.

The body was laid out on the table, clad in the dress she had expressly chosen, her arms crossed on her breast, with a wax candle in her hands—and all this he regarded utterly impassively. A mass of people of all stations filled the courtyard, large numbers of visitors came for the funeral, long tables were set out in the garden, groaning under the weight of wines, pies and special funeral meals, the guests chatted and wept, looked at the deceased, praised her excellent qualities, and observed her widowed husband; but he himself regarded all this with a strange look. The coffin was at last borne off; the mourners followed and he went with them; the priests were garbed in full vestments, the sun shone, small infants wailed in their mothers' arms, skylarks sang, children clad in nothing but shirts ran and frolicked along the road. Finally the coffin was set to rest above the grave and he was bidden to come forward and kiss his deceased spouse for the last time; he came forward, kissed her, tears formed in his eyes, but they were strangely impassive tears. The coffin was lowered, the priest took up a spade and threw in the first shovelful of earth, the choir of the deacon and two sextons intoned "Eternal Memory" in deep, lingering tones beneath a bright, cloudless sky, the gravediggers took up their shovels, filled in the grave and evened the surface,—whereupon he made his way forward. The crowd parted to let him through, anxious to know what his intentions were. He raised his eyes, cast a troubled look around him and said: "But you've already gone and buried her! Why?!.." He stopped there, unable to finish what he was saying.

But on his return home, when he saw that his room was empty, that even Pulcheria Ivanovna's favourite chair had been removed, he set to weeping, weeping uncontrollably, inconsolably, and the tears flowed in a stream from his darkened eyes.

A further five years passed. What sorrow is not healed by time? What passion can survive in the unequal struggle with the passing of time? I recall an acquaintance of mine, a young man in the prime of his strength, filled with true nobility and other admirable qualities. I knew him tenderly, passionately, madly, boldly, modestly in love, and while I knew him—practically before my eyes—the object of his passion—a creature as tender and beautiful as an angel—was struck down by insatiable death. I have never seen such terrible surges of spiritual suffering, such searing grief, such all-consuming despair, as were endured by this unhappy lover. I never thought that a man could create such a hell for himself, admitting to it not the shade or image of hope or anything remotely similar to it... His family endeavoured not to let him out of their sight; they concealed from him weapons lest he try and kill himself. Two weeks later he made a sudden recovery: he started to laugh and tell jokes; he was allowed to roam around freely and the first use to which he put this freedom was to go and buy a pistol. One day his relatives were horrified to hear the report of a pistol. They ran into his room and found him lying prone with a shattered skull. A doctor who happened to be at hand, and whose skill was much celebrated at the time, detected signs of life in him, declared the wound to be not entirely fatal and, to everyone's amazement, he was assisted to recovery. Surveillance was increased over him. He was not even given a knife at table and care was taken to remove everything which he could use to injure himself; but he soon found another opportunity, this time throwing himself under the wheels of a passing carriage. His arm and leg were shattered; but once again he recovered. A year after this I saw him in a crowded room: he sat at a table chatting away merrily: a game of petit ouvert was in progress, he had turned over one card and behind him, leaning on the back of his chair, stood his young wife, counting his chips.

At the expiry of the said period of five years after the death of Pulcheria Ivanovna I found myself in those parts and paid a visit to Afanasy Ivanovich's little estate, in the hope of seeing

my old neighbour, in whose company I had spent many a pleasurable day, always gorging myself on my delightful hostess's delicious concoctions. When I rode up to their gate the house struck me as twice as old as before, the peasants' huts leant over tipsily, no doubt just like their owners; the palisade and wattle fence in the courtyard were completely derelict and I myself observed the cook pulling sticks from it to use as kindling for the stove when all she needed do was take two more steps to reach a ready pile of brushwood. I rode sadly up to the porch, to be met by the same motley assortment of mongrel dogs, some by now blind or with broken legs, barking, raising high their undulating burr-festooned tails. An old man came out to meet me. So this was Afanasy Ivanovich! I at once recognized him; but he was hunched up twice as much as before. He recognized me and greeted me with the same familiar smile. I followed him into the house; everything inside appeared to be as before; but I could feel everywhere a strange disorder, a tangible absence of something; in other words I experienced those same feelings that overtake all of us when we enter the home of a widower for the first time, a man whom we knew previously as inseparable from his spouse and life's companion. These feelings are similar to those aroused by an encounter with someone we knew as a healthy person, who has since lost a leg. The absence of bustling Pulcheria Ivanovna was apparent in everything: one of the knives laid out on the table had no handle; the food itself had not been prepared with such skill. I did not wish to ask any questions about household affairs and was afraid even to look at the outbuildings.

When we sat down to eat a maid put a napkin round Afanasy Ivanovich's neck and it was a very good thing she did so, for otherwise he would have covered his gown with gravy. I tried to amuse him by telling him all the latest news, and he listened with his customary smile but at times his eyes were entirely impassive, without the flicker of a thought in them. He often raised his spoon to his nose instead of to his mouth and prodded his fork into the waterjug instead of into the chicken, whereupon the maid took his hand in her own and guided him to his chicken. We sometimes had to wait several minutes for the next dish. Afanasy Ivanovich even started to notice this himself and asked: "Why is it taking so long to bring the food?" but I could see through the chink in the door

that the kitchen boy who should have been bringing us the dishes was not even thinking about this and was asleep with his head resting on the bench.

"Now this dish," pronounced Afanasy Ivanovich, when we were served dumplings in sour cream, "Now this dish," he repeated, and I noticed that his voice started to tremble and tears formed in his leaden eyes, but he made a consummate effort and pulled himself together. "This is the dish which my la.. la.. late wi..." and suddenly burst into tears. His hand fell onto his plate, the plate tipped over, flew to the ground and smashed, spraying gravy all over him. He sat there inertly, inertly holding his spoon, and the tears gushed down his face like a stream, a silently flowing fountain, onto his napkin.

"Goodness!" I thought, as I looked at him. Five years of all-erasing time, and to think that this old man, already so lifeless, someone who had lived his whole life without experiencing a single strong emotion, and whose life seemed to consist entirely of sitting on a tall chair eating dried fish and pears, and telling good-natured stories, should have endured such long and searing grief. Which has more power over us: passion or habit? Or are all violent urges, the entire whirlwind of our desires and seething passions only the product of our impressionable age, and for this reason alone seem to us to be deep and destructive? Be this as it may, all our passions struck me as childish when compared to this long, drawn-out and almost insensible habit. A few times he tried to pronounce the deceased's name, but in mid-word his normally tranquil face crumpled into a piteous grimace, and my heart was rent by his childlike sobbing. Now, these were not the tears which are issued in such abundance by old folk when expounding to us their unhappy lot; neither were these the tears which they shed over a glass of punch; no! these were tears which flowed of their own will, unbidden, accumulated from the searing pain in an already cold heart.

He did not live long after this. I learnt recently of his death. However the strangest thing is that the circumstances of his death had something in common with those of Pulcheria Ivanovna's demise. One day Afanasy Ivanovich decided to take a little walk around the garden. As he walked slowly along a path in his usual careless state, his mind empty of any thoughts, a strange thing occurred. He suddenly heard

someone calling to him from behind in a quite unmistakable voice: "Afanasy Ivanovich!" He turned round, but behind him there was no one, he looked all around, peeped into the bushes —there was no one to be seen. It was a quiet day, and the sun shone down. He grew pensive for a moment: his face took on a lively expression and at last he announced: "It's Pulcheria Ivanovna calling me!"

I am sure that you have at some time heard a voice calling your name, this, country folk say, is the soul, weary of waiting, summoning a person; this inevitably is followed by his death. I must admit I have always been terrified of this mysterious call. I remember that I often used to hear it as a child: I would hear someone behind me quite distinctly pronounce my name. It would usually be a dazzling sunny day; not a leaf stirring on the trees, a dead silence reigning, undisturbed even by the singing of crickets, not a soul in the garden; but I must say that it was more terrifying to feel this uncanny silence in the middle of a cloudless day, than to be lost, alone, in the most tempestuous and furious night, alive with all the infernal elements, deep in an impenetrable forest. On such occasions I would usually run gasping with terror from the garden and only calm down when I saw someone coming towards me, the appearance of another human being banishing this terrible inward sense of emptiness.

He entirely surrendered to the conviction that this was Pulcheria Ivanovna calling him; he surrendered with the submission of an obedient child, withering away, guttering and melting like a candle, and finally snuffing out like the miserable flame of a candle which has burnt itself to nothing. "Lay me to rest beside Pulcheria Ivanovna"—this was all he had to say before he passed away.

His desire was fulfilled and he was buried beside the church, near the grave of his Pulcheria Ivanovna. There were fewer guests at the funeral, but the same numbers of common folk and beggars. Now their house was completely empty. The enterprising bailiff in collusion with the headman had carted away into their own huts all the remaining antique pieces and all the possessions which had not been thieved by the housekeeper. Soon some distant relative arrived, God knows where from, heir to the estate, a retired lieutenant, in I do not recall which regiment, and a fearful reformer. He at once

descried the extreme devastation and chaos in the management, and determined to eradicate this at once, to set matters to rights and establish order throughout. He bought six splendid English sickles, nailed a number to each hut, and finally established such order that six months later the estate passed into the hands of the trustees. The prudent trustees (a former assessor and a staff captain attired in a faded uniform) in a short period of time disposed of all the poultry and eggs. The huts became more and more derelict and finally collapsed altogether; the peasants took to drinking and most of them ran away. The rightful owner, who incidentally lived on good terms with his trustees and drank punch together with them, visited his village very rarely and for brief stays. To this day he still tours all the Ukrainian fairs, carefully inquiring into the price of various wholesale produce, such as flour, hemp, honey and so forth, but in fact only occasionally buys small trifles, like flints, a nail to clean his pipe and similar rubbish, the total value of which is never more than one ruble.

1834

STORY OF HOW IVAN IVANOVICH QUARRELLED WITH IVAN NIKIFOROVICH

It is my duty first to inform my readers that the incident described in this story refers to a distant time. Furthermore, it is a complete fiction. Now Mirgorod is quite different. The buildings are different; the puddle in the middle of the town has long since dried up and the officials, the judge, the assistant judge and the mayor are respectable and benevolent people.

Chapter one

IVAN IVANOVICH AND IVAN NIKIFOROVICH

What a splendid coat Ivan Ivanovich has! a superb coat! With a trimming of Persian lamb! And heavens above, what a trimming! dove-grey shot through with silver! I'm prepared to bet my last button that no one else has a trimming to match it! I ask you, just look at it, especially when he's in conversation with someone, look from the side: a treat for the eyes! Words cannot describe it: velvet! silver! fire! Merciful God! Saints in heaven! why cannot I have a coat like that! He had it made back in the days before Agafya Fedoseyevna went on her trip to Kiev. Do you know Agafya Fedoseyevna? she's the one who bit off the assessor's ear.

He's a splendid fellow, that Ivan Ivanovich! You should see his house in Mirgorod! It's surrounded on all sides by a covered porch with oak supports, and there are benches all along the porch. When the weather gets too hot, Ivan Ivanovich throws off his coat and his caftan, remaining in his shirtsleeves. Like this he relaxes on the porch watching the happenings in the yard and in the street. And you should see the apple trees and pear trees that grow right beneath his

windows! Just open the window and they thrust their branches into the room. These grow in front of the house, but if you could only see the rest of the garden! It has everything: plums, cherries, all sorts of vegetables, sunflowers, cucumbers, melons, beans, even a barn and a forge.

Ivan Ivanovich is a splended fellow! He is extremely fond of melons. They're his favourite food. The moment he's finished his lunch he steps out onto the porch in his shirt-sleeves, and tells Gapka to bring him two melons. He slices them up himself, collecting the seeds together in a piece of paper, and sets about eating them. Then he orders Gapka to bring an inkwell, and with his own hand inscribes on the twist of paper with the seeds: "This melon eaten on such-and-such a date". If he had had a guest that day he would then add: "with the participation of such-and-such".

The late judge of Mirgorod was always a great admirer of Ivan Ivanovich's house. Yes, it's not a bad little house. I like the way sheds and outhouses have been built onto it on all sides, so that if you look at it from afar all you can see are roofs, laid one on top the other, looking for all the world like a plate heaped with pancakes, or even more like those mushrooms that grow on trees. Incidentally, the roofs are all covered with reeds; a willow, an oak and two apple trees have spread their leafy branches over them. Peeping between the trees, and occasionally even looking out onto the street are little windows with carved, whitewashed shutters.

Yes, Ivan Ivanovich is a splendid fellow! The Commissar of Poltava is an acquaintance of his! Dorosh Tarasovich Pukhivochka always calls in to see him when he rides out of Khorol. And as for Father Pyotr, who lives in Koliberda, he always says when he has about five guests, that he knows no one who so conscientiously fulfils his Christian duty and lives so well as Ivan Ivanovich.

But Lord, how time flies! by the time of this story ten years have passed since he buried his wife. He has no children. Gapka has some children who often run about the yard. Ivan Ivanovich always gives them each a roll, or a piece of melon, or a pear. Gapka keeps the keys to all his closets and cellars but the keys to the big trunk which stays in his bedroom and to the middle barn Ivan Ivanovich keeps himself, and does not like to let anyone else into it. Gapka is a strapping wench, with

firm calves and rosy cheeks, and wears home-spun cotton dresses.

Ivan Ivanovich is such a God-fearing man! Every single Sunday he dons his coat and sets off for church. On entering Ivan Ivanovich bows all around him and then positions himself in the choir whence he demonstrates his excellent bass. When the service is over Ivan Ivanovich feels he simply has to do the rounds of all the beggars. Perhaps he might forgo this tedious activity, was he not impelled to it by his innate kindness.

"Good day, poor woman!" he will usually say, selecting the most wretched of the beggarwomen, in her tattered patchwork dress. "Where do you hail from, woman?" "I come from a farm, sir, I haven't had a bite to eat or a drop to drink for three days, my own children turned me out." "You poor soul, but what made you come here?" "I've come a-begging, sir, hoping you merciful folk might give me a few kopecks for a piece of bread."

"Hm! But do you really want some bread?" Ivan Ivanovich usually asks.

"Of course! I'm as famished as a dog."

"Hm!" Ivan Ivanovich will reply, "then perhaps you'd also like some meat?"

"Anything that your merciful lordship gives me, I'll be grateful for it all."

"Hm! but surely you don't think meat is better than bread?"

"What difference does it make to a starving old woman? Anything you are so kind as to give, it's all good." Whereupon the old woman holds out her hand. "Well, step along now, God be with you," says Ivan Ivanovich. "Why are you standing there? I haven't boxed your ears now, have I!" and after addressing similar questions to a second, a third, he will finally return home, or call in to see his neighbour Ivan Nikiforovich for a glass of vodka, or the judge, or the mayor.

Ivan Ivanovich particularly likes to receive presents from people. This always pleases him.

Ivan Nikiforovich is also a very fine man. His yard is adjacent to Ivan Ivanovich's. They are such close friends that you will not find their like anywhere in the world. Anton Prokofievich Pupopuz, who to this day still goes around in a brown

top coat with pale blue sleeves and eats Sunday dinner at the judge's, used to say that Ivan Nikiforovich and Ivan Ivanovich were bound together by the devil himself with a piece of rope. Where one went the other would follow.

Ivan Nikiforovich never married. Although rumour had it that he was married once, this was pure slander. I know Ivan Nikiforovich extremely well, and I can assert that he has never even had the least intention of marrying. Where on earth do all these rumours come from? Like the one about Ivan Nikiforovich being born with a tail on his backside. But this invention was so stupid and repulsive that I do not even regard it necessary to refute it for my enlightened readers, who without any doubt know that only witches, and then very few of them, have tails on their behinds, and that these, moreover, belong more often to the female sex than the male.

Despite their great intimacy, these two friends are not all that similar. The best way of revealing their characters is by comparison: Ivan Ivanovich has a great gift for talking, and talking in the most agreeable fashion. Lord, you should hear him talk! The sensation he produces can only be compared to that of someone searching through your hair or gently stroking your heel. You listen and listen—and your head sinks. So pleasant! Extraordinarily pleasant! like a nap after taking a bath. Ivan Nikiforovich, on the other hand, is often silent, but then if he does blurt out a word you have to be on your marks: it'll shave you cleaner than any razor. Ivan Ivanovich is lean and tall; Ivan Nikiforovich is not so tall, but his mass is distributed in a more lateral direction. Ivan Ivanovich's head is similar to a root-downwards turnip; Ivan Nikiforovich's like an upended turnip. It is only after his lunch that Ivan Ivanovich lies on the porch in his shirtsleeves; in the evening he dons his coat and goes for a walk, either to the shop, which he supplies with flour, or to the fields to catch quails. Ivan Nikiforovich lies on his porch the whole day; if the weather is not too hot he usually exposes his back to the sun and does not feel like going for any walks. If the idea enters his head in the morning, then he will walk around the yard, inspect his plot, and return to rest. In the old days he used to call round to see Ivan Ivanovich. Ivan Ivanovich is an extremely refined person and in proper conversation will never utter an indecent word and will be most offended if he hears one. Ivan Nikiforovich

sometimes forgets himself; when this happens Ivan Ivanovich rises to his feet and says: "Now that will do, Ivan Nikiforovich; better let us go out into the sun than utter such ungodly words." Ivan Ivanovich gets very angry if a fly lands in his borsch; he flies into a rage, tosses aside his plate and berates the host. Ivan Nikiforovich is extremely fond of bathing and, once immersed up to his neck in the water, calls for a table and samovar to be set up right there in the water, as he loves to drink tea in that cool environment. Ivan Ivanovich shaves his beard twice a week; Ivan Nikiforovich only once. Ivan Ivanovich is extremely curious by nature. God forbid that you should ever start to tell him a story and not tell it to the end! Should he be displeased with something he will at once let you know. It is very hard to tell by looking at Ivan Nikiforovich whether he is pleased or angry; he may be delighted about something yet not show it. Ivan Ivanovich is of a somewhat timid disposition. Ivan Nikiforovich, by contrast, has such immensely baggy trousers that if you were to blow them up they would accommodate the entire yard complete with barns and outhouses. Ivan Ivanovich has large, expressive eyes the colour of tobacco and a mouth rather like the letter V; Ivan Nikiforovich's eyes are small and yellowish, completely submerged between his shaggy eyebrows and plump cheeks, while his nose looks like a ripe plum. Should he offer you some of his snuff, Ivan Ivanovich will always first lick the lid of the snuff-box, then tap it with his finger and, holding it out, say, if you are acquainted: "Sir, dare I ask you to be my guest?", and, if you are not acquainted: "Sir, without knowing your rank, name or patronymic, dare I ask you to be my guest?" Ivan Nikiforovich, however, will simply hand you his snuff-box with the words: "Help yourself." Both Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich are extremely hostile to fleas; for this reason neither Ivan Ivanovich nor Ivan Nikiforovich will let any Jew hawker past their house without buying one of his little phials of elixir against these insects, first giving him a thorough scolding for professing the Jewish faith.

All in all, despite certain points of difference, both Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich are splendid people.

Chapter Two

FROM WHICH IT CAN BE ASCERTAINED WHAT IVAN IVANOVICH SET HIS HEART ON, THE TENOR OF HIS CONVERSATION WITH IVAN NIKIFOROVICH, AND HOW IT ENDED

One morning in the month of July Ivan Ivanovich was lying on his porch. It was a hot day, the air was dry and shimmered in the heat. Ivan Ivanovich had already been out of town to see the mowers and to visit his farm, had had time to stop and ask the peasants he met on the way where they were from, where they were bound and why; he had quite exhausted himself and lay down for a little rest. Lying on his back he cast a lingering look over the outhouses, yard, sheds, and chickens running in the yard, and thought to himself: "Lord God Almighty, what a fine place I have! What have I not got? Poultry, outhouses, barns, all sorts of nice things, home-made fruit vodka; a garden full of pears and plums; poppies, cabbage, peas in the vegetable garden... What more could a man ask for? Indeed, what more could I ask for?"

Having asked himself this profound question Ivan Ivanovich grew pensive; meanwhile his eyes, searching out new objects, roved across his fence into Ivan Nikiforovich's property and alighted on a highly curious spectacle. A scrawny woman was carrying out a series of rumpled garments and hanging them out on a clothes-line to air. Soon an old uniform with frayed lapels stretched out its sleeves in the wind and embraced the adjacent brocaded jacket, while behind it appeared a civil uniform with emblazoned buttons, a moth-eaten collar, and white worsted pantaloons with stains, which had once clothed Ivan Nikiforovich's legs, and would now barely clothe his fingers. These were shortly followed by another pair in the form of an inverted V. After this came a Cossack caftan, which Ivan Nikiforovich had made about twenty years ago, when he was preparing to enter the home guard and had already grown a moustache. Finally, in addition to the above, there appeared a sword, looking like a steeple dangling point downwards. Then there unfolded the skirts of something looking like a grass-green caftan with brass buttons as big as five-kopeck pieces. From behind the skirts

peeped a gold-braided waistcoat, handsomely cut away in front. The waistcoat was soon concealed by an old skirt belonging to Ivan Nikiforovich's late grandmother, fitted with pockets large enough to accommodate a watermelon. All this taken together provided an extremely fascinating spectacle for Ivan Ivanovich, especially with the rays of the sun alighting now on a blue, now a green sleeve, on a red lapel, or gold brocade, or playing on the point of the sword, giving the scene an odd appearance, not unlike one of those puppet shows trundled around the villages by artful pedlars. It was particularly reminiscent of those exciting scenes with Herod in his gold crown, or St. Anthony leading a goat, favourites with the crowd who press forward to watch as behind the booth a fiddle whines, and the gypsy strums his lips in imitation of a drum, while the sun descends and the bracing chill of the southern night imperceptibly nestles closer to the firm shoulders and breasts of the plump peasant wenches.

Soon the old woman emerged from the storeroom, grunting as she hauled along an antique saddle with torn stirrups, scuffed leather holsters, and a saddle cloth that had once been bright scarlet, with gold stitching and brass buckles. "The stupid old woman! Next thing she'll drag out Ivan Nikiforovich to air him!"

Sure enough: Ivan Ivanovich was not entirely mistaken in his conjecture. Five minutes later Ivan Nikiforovich's nankeen galligaskins ascended to the clothes line and took occupation of almost half the courtyard. After this she carried out a cap and a gun.

"What on earth is all this!" thought Ivan Ivanovich: "I've never seen a gun in Ivan Nikiforovich's house. What can it mean? He doesn't do any shooting, but he keeps a gun! What does he need a gun for? It's a handsome weapon, too! I've wanted one like that for a long time. I'd like to get hold of that piece; I'm very fond of playing round with guns. Hey, woman!" he called, beckoning to the old woman.

She came up to the fence.

"What's that you've got there, old woman?"

"You can see for yourself, it's a gun."

"What gun?"

"How am I to know! If it was my own, then maybe I'd know what it was made of. But it belongs to the master."

Ivan Ivanovich stood up and started examining the gun all over, and even forgot to scold the old woman for having put it out to air together with the sword.

"It looks like it be made of iron," continued the old woman.

"Hmm! iron. Why should it be made of iron?" Ivan Ivanovich said to himself. "And has the master had it a long time?"

"He could have, yes."

"A nice little piece!" continued Ivan Ivanovich: "I'll ask him for it. What use does he have for it? Or maybe I'll swap it for something. Hey, old woman, is the master at home?"

"He is."

"What's he doing? Lying down?"

"Lying down".

"That's good, I'll call in and see him."

Ivan Ivanovich put on his coat, took his knotted stick in his hand to beat off the dogs, because you encounter far more dogs than people on the streets of Mirgorod, and set off.

Although Ivan Nikiforovich's plot was next door to Ivan Ivanovich's and you could climb from one into the other across the fence, Ivan Ivanovich nevertheless went there by way of the street. You had to turn from this street into a lane, which was so narrow that if two one-horse carts met in it they could not get past one another, and would stay put until each of them had been pulled out by their rear wheels back onto the streets whence they'd come. Pedestrians emerged from the lane garlanded with burrs that grew on both sides along the fence. Overlooking the lane on one side was Ivan Ivanovich's shed, on the other Ivan Nikiforovich's barn, gates and dove-cote.

Ivan Ivanovich stepped up to the gate and rattled the bolt: this set the dogs barking inside; but the mixed assortment of hounds scurried back wagging their tails when they saw that the visitor was a friend. Ivan Ivanovich crossed the yard, populated with colourful Indian doves, which Ivan Nikiforovich fed by hand, and decorated with melon and watermelon peel, with patches of grass, the odd broken wheel, or barrel hoop, or an urchin slouching about in a grubby smock—the sort of scene beloved by the artist! The shadow thrown by the clothes on the line almost entirely covered the yard and lent it a pleasant coolness. The old woman met him with a bow, and

stood gaping at him. In front of the house was an attractive little porch with an awning supported by two oaken posts—a flimsy protection from the sun, which at this time of year in the Ukraine shines in deadly earnest and bathes the pedestrian from head to foot with hot sweat. It is a good indication of how badly Ivan Ivanovich had set his heart on the gun, that he would venture forth at such an hour, contrary even to his invariable habit of taking a walk only in the evening.

The room into which Ivan Ivanovich stepped was quite dark, because the shutters had been closed, and the sunbeam that penetrated the hole cut in the shutter took on a rainbow hue and projected a colourful image of the landscape outside onto the opposite wall, of the thatched roofs, trees and clothes hanging on the line, but all inverted. This imparted to the room a mysterious half-light.

"God be with you!" said Ivan Ivanovich.

"Ah! Goodday to you, Ivan Ivanovich!" answered a voice from the corner of the room. Only then did Ivan Ivanovich notice Ivan Nikiforovich, lying on a carpet spread on the floor. "Forgive me for appearing before you in the raw." Ivan Nikiforovich was lying there stark naked, even without his shirt.

"Not at all. Did you have a rest today, Ivan Nikiforovich?"

"I did. And did you have a rest, Ivan Ivanovich?"

"I did".

"So you have only just got up now?"

"Just got up? The good Lord be with you, Ivan Nikiforovich! how could one sleep until this hour? I have just come from my farm. You should see the wonderful crops along the road! marvellous! and the hay grown so tall, soft and juicy!"

"Gorpina!" shouted Ivan Nikiforovich, "bring Ivan Ivanovich some vodka, and pies and sour cream."

"Isn't it a fine day today?"

"Nothing fine about it, Ivan Ivanovich. Devil take the damned weather! the heat's unbearable."

"So you have to go and take the devil's name. Now, Ivan Nikiforovich, you mark my words or it will be too late: you'll get your deserts in the next world for all your cursing".

"Now how have I offended you, Ivan Ivanovich? I said nothing about your father, or your mother. I don't know what I said to offend you."

"Never mind, Ivan Nikiforovich!"

"I swear to God, I did not mean to offend you, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"It's strange that the quail aren't answering the pipe yet."

"Be it as you like, think what you want, but I did not mean to offend you in any way".

"I just cannot think why they aren't answering," said Ivan Ivanovich, as if unaware of what Ivan Nikiforovich was saying. "Perhaps it's not quite the time for it yet, although you would have thought it was."

"You were saying that the crops are good."

"Excellent crops, excellent!" this was followed by a silence.

"Tell me, Ivan Nikiforovich, what's all this hanging out of clothes?" Ivan Ivanovich finally got out.

"That cursed old woman has ruined some perfectly good, almost brand new clothes. I'm now airing them, it's fine cloth, excellent cloth, all I have to do is turn them and I can wear them again."

"There was something there I liked very much, Ivan Nikiforovich."

"What?"

"Tell me, what do you need that gun for, the one you put out to air with your clothes?" Here Ivan Ivanovich held forth his snuff-box. "Dare I ask you to be my guest?"

"Thank you, but you help yourself! I'll take some of my own!" Whereupon Ivan Nikiforovich patted the ground around him and found his horn. "The stupid old hag, fancy going and hanging up the gun too! There's a Jew in Sorochintsy makes this tobacco. It's fine stuff. I don't know what he puts in it, but it has a superb fragrance. It's not unlike cloves. Just try some, hold it in your mouth for a while. Don't you think it smells like cloves? Go on, help yourself!"

"Now, tell me, Ivan Nikiforovich, about this gun again, what do you intend to do with it? I mean, you have no use for the thing."

"What do you mean, I have no use for it? What if I go shooting?"

"Good Lord above, Ivan Nikiforovich, when would you go shooting? After the second coming, perhaps. As far as I know and as far as people can remember, you've never shot a single duck, and your character was not ordained by God for shoot-

ing. You are of a stately build and figure, it's not for you to go trudging through bogs, and if even now you have to air certain items of your clothing, which it is not seemly to mention by name, what can one expect then? Yes, you would do better to rest, to take relaxation at home." (Ivan Ivanovich, as we mentioned before, favoured a most eloquent turn of phrase when he was pressing a point. The way he could talk! Good Lord, how he talked!) "Yes, you must engage only in more decorous activities. Listen, why don't you let me have it?"

"How could I let you have it? It's an expensive gun. You won't find guns like that anywhere. I bought it from a Turk when I was planning to join the home guard. So how could I go and give it to you now? Out of the question. I need it."

"What do you need it for?"

"What for? And when the house is attacked by robbers?... Of course I need it! Good heavens above! now I'm calm and not afraid of anyone. And why? Because I know that I have a gun in my storeroom."

"A fine gun! With a broken catch!"

"It's not broken. Easily fixed. And an occasional drop of hemp-oil would stop it rusting."

"I cannot detect any indication of a favourable disposition towards me in your words, Ivan Nikiforovich. You are not prepared to make any concessions to me as a mark of friendship."

"Are you telling me that I don't display any friendship towards you, Ivan Ivanovich? How can you say such a thing! Your oxen graze on my steppe and I have never confiscated any of them. When you go to Poltava, do you not always ask me for a cart? and have I ever refused? Your kids are always climbing through my fence and playing with my dogs—and I don't say a thing: let them play away, so long as they do not touch anything! let them play!"

"If you do not wish to give it to me then let's make a swap."

"What will you give me for it?" At this point Ivan Nikiforovich propped himself up on his elbow and looked at Ivan Ivanovich.

"I'll give you that brown sow, the one I've been fattening up. She's a fine animal! You wait and see, next year she'll bring you a litter of piglets"

"I really do not know how you, Ivan Ivanovich, can say such things. What do I want your pig for? Unless to prepare a funeral feast for the devil."

"There you go again, bringing the devil into it! Shame on you, by the good Lord, shame on you, Ivan Nikiforovich!"

"No, but really, Ivan Ivanovich, how can you offer some stupid old pig for my gun, Ivan Ivanovich?"

"What do you mean, some stupid old pig, Ivan Nikiforovich?"

"Now really, think about it yourself. A gun, now that's something definite, but a pig is just a pig. If this hadn't come from you, I might well have taken it as an insult."

"What have you seen that's wrong about my pig?"

"Exactly who do you take me for? to think that I would..."

"Now, now, keep your hair on! I'll say no more... You can keep your old gun, leave it in the corner of your shed to rust and rot away—I don't want to speak about it any more."

This was followed by a silence.

"They say," Ivan Ivanovich began, "that the three kings have declared war on our Tsar."

"Yes, Pyotr Fyodorovich told me about it; but what war is it? And what's it about?

"I can't say for sure, Ivan Nikiforovich, what it's about. I imagine that the kings want us to adopt the Turkish faith."

"Ai, the scoundrels, so that's what they're after!" exclaimed Ivan Nikiforovich, lifting his head.

"So, you see, our Tsar has declared war on them for it. No, he says, instead you take the Christian faith!"

"And so? Our chaps will beat them, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"So they will. So, Ivan Nikiforovich, you do not want to exchange your gun?"

"I'm surprised at you, Ivan Ivanovich: you would appear to be a man of some learning, and yet you're talking like a child. What sort of fool..."

"Come, come, don't take on. Never mind your gun! Let it rot away, I won't say any more about it!..."

At this moment snacks were served.

Ivan Ivanovich drank a glass of vodka and chased it down with a pie and sour cream.

"Listen, Ivan Nikiforovich. In addition to the pig, I'll give you two bags of oats, and remember that you didn't sow any

oats this year, so you'll have to buy some anyway."

"For God's sake, Ivan Ivanovich, you have to be spoken to on a belly-full of peas." (This was nothing compared to some of the things Ivan Nikiforovich used to say). "Where have you heard of anyone exchanging a gun for two sacks of oats. I bet you won't throw your coat in too!"

"But, Ivan Nikiforovich, you're forgetting that I'm also offering you my pig".

"What! two sacks of oats and a pig for a gun?"

"Well, isn't that enough?"

"For a gun?"

"Of course, for a gun".

"Two sacks for a gun?"

"The two sacks are not empty, but contain oats, and have you forgotten the pig?"

"You can go and kiss your pig, or the devil if you prefer!"

"Oh! there you go again! You wait and see: your tongue will be spiked with red-hot needles in the next world for such sacrilegious words. After talking to you one has to wash one's face and hands and thoroughly fumigate one's person."

"Please, my dear Ivan Ivanovich: the gun is a noble object, a most agreeable thing to sport with, and a pleasant ornament to a room..."

"Ivan Nikiforovich, why are you fussing about that stupid old gun *like a halfwit*?" said Ivan Ivanovich with irritation, now beginning to get really cross.

"Well, and you, Ivan Ivanovich, are a proper *goose.*"

If Ivan Nikiforovich had never uttered this word, they would merely have had their argument and parted friends as ever; but events took quite a different turn now. Ivan Ivanovich flared up.

"What was that you said, Ivan Nikiforovich?" he enquired, raising his voice.

"I said that you look like a goose, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"How dare you, sir; have your forgotten all your manners and respect for the rank and name of your fellow human being, that you dishonour him with such an offensive name?"

"What's offensive about it? And why have you started waving your arms about, Ivan Ivanovich?"

"I repeat: how could you dare, in defiance of all the rules of decorum, call me a goose?"

"I sneeze on your head, Ivan Ivanovich! What are you cackling on about?"

Ivan Ivanovich could no longer keep control of himself: his lips trembled; his mouth relinquished its usual V shape and took on that of the letter O; his eyes started to blink so rapidly that he was fearful to behold. This happened extremely rarely to Ivan Ivanovich, and only in moments of extreme agitation.

"In that case I would like to inform you," announced Ivan Ivanovich, "that I do not wish to know you!"

"See if I care! And don't expect me to shed any tears about it!"

But he was lying, I swear to God, he was lying! he was very upset to hear this.

"I'll never set foot in your house again!"

"Indeed?" said Ivan Nikiforovich, himself not knowing what to do in his vexation, and contrary to his usual custom, rising to his feet. "Hey, woman, boy!" At this there appeared in the doorway the same scrawny old woman and a small boy, enveloped in a long and baggy topcoat, "Take Ivan Ivanovich by the arms and conduct him off the property!

"What? You'll do that to a gentleman?" exclaimed Ivan Ivanovich with self-righteous indignation. "Just you dare! Go on, try it! I'll slaughter you together with your stupid master! There'll be no trace of you for the crows!" (Ivan Ivanovich always expressed himself in extremely strong terms when his ire was aroused.)

Together they presented a striking tableau: Ivan Nikiforovich standing in the middle of the room in his full, and utterly unadorned splendour! The old woman, mouth agape and an idiotic expression of utter terror written on her face! Ivan Ivanovich with his hand raised above his head, like a statue of a Roman tribune! This was a most extraordinary moment! a magnificent spectacle! And all the while they only had one spectator: the urchin in his immense top-coat, who stood there quite unruffled, picking his nose.

Finally Ivan Ivanovich reached for his hat.

"This is a fine way to behave, Ivan Nikiforovich! excellent! I shall not let you forget this."

"Off you go, Ivan Ivanovich! off with you! and make sure you don't come my way again, or I shall completely flatten your ugly mug, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"And here's my reply to you, Ivan Nikiforovich!" answered Ivan Ivanovich, making a rude gesture and slamming the door behind him, which then reopened with a creak.

Ivan Nikiforovich appeared in the doorway and was about to add something, but Ivan Ivanovich did not look round again and flew out of the yard.

Chapter Three

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE QUARREL BETWEEN IVAN IVANOVICH AND IVAN NIKIFOROVICH

Thus, two respected citizens, the pride and glory of Mirgorod, had fallen out! and over what? Over a trifle, a goose. They no longer wanted to see one another, and cut off all ties, a pair who had been renowned as inseparable friends! Every day Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich would send to one another to find out about the other's health and would often engage one another in conversation from their balconies and hold such agreeable discourse that it was a joy to the heart to hear them. Every Sunday Ivan Ivanovich, attired in his worsted coat and Ivan Nikiforovich in his nankeen rust-coloured caftan would set off for church, almost arm-in-arm. And if Ivan Ivanovich, who had extraordinarily keen eyesight, should be the first to espy a puddle or some dirt in the middle of the road, as was not uncommon in Mirgorod, he would always say to Ivan Nikiforovich: "Now take care, don't put your foot here, for it it's not clean." For his own part, Ivan Nikiforovich would also display the most touching signs of friendship and, however far away he might be standing, he would always hold out his horn to Ivan Ivanovich with the words: "Help yourself!" And what wonderful farms the two of them had!... And now these two friends... When I heard about it I was thunderstruck! For a long time I wouldn't believe it: Good Lord above! Ivan Ivanovich has quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich! Those worthy citizens?! If that is true, what can be lasting in this world?

When Ivan Ivanovich arrived home, he was in a state of extreme agitation for a long time. Formerly he would first have

called into the stables to see whether his mare was eating its hay (Ivan Ivanovich has a roan mare with a star on its forehead; a fine horse); then he would feed the turkeys and piglets from his own hand and retire to his room where he would either make wooden bowls (he could whittle with great skill, as well as any cabinet maker), or read a book, published by Liubiy, Gariy and Popov (Ivan Ivanovich did not remember the title because his servant girl had long since torn off the title page to amuse her baby), or he would take a nap on the porch. Now he was unable to turn to any of his usual occupations. Instead, on seeing Gapka, he started to scold her, asking why she was idly loitering about when in fact she was carrying a bag of groats to the kitchen; he threw a stick at the rooster which had come onto the porch for its usual treat; and when a grubby urchin came running up to him in his tattered shirt shouting: "Daddy, daddy, give us a biscuit!" he thundered at him so fearfully and stamped his feet in such rage that the terrified child took to his heels.

Finally he recovered his composure and set about his everyday pursuits. He sat down to his dinner late and it was almost evening before he lay down for his rest on the porch. The tasty borsch with pigeons, prepared for him by Gapka, completely expelled from his mind all thoughts of that morning's adventure. Ivan Ivanovich's eyes once more roamed over his property with a sense of contentent. Finally his gaze came to rest on the adjacent yard and he thought to himself: "I haven't been over to see Ivan Nikiforovich today: I'll just pop round." Having resolved this Ivan Ivanovich took up his stick and cap and set off into the street but no sooner had he left his gates than he remembered the quarrel, spat and returned home. Almost exactly the same manoeuvre was performed by Ivan Nikiforovich. Ivan Ivanovich saw the old woman place her foot on the fence preparing to climb into his yard when suddenly Ivan Nikiforovich's voice rang out: "Back! Back! you're not to go there!" However, Ivan Ivanovich started to feel pangs of regret, and it is very likely that these worthy people might have made up the very next day were it not for a special occurrence in Ivan Nikiforovich's house, which completely destroyed any hope of reconciliaton and added fuel to the by now feeble flames of their enmity.

That same evening Agafya Fedoseyevna came to visit Ivan

Nikiforovich. Agafya Fedoseyevna was neither a relative, nor a sister-in-law, nor even a cousin twice removed to Ivan Nikiforovich. There did not seem to be any real reason for her visits and he was not particularly delighted to see her; however she would call to see him and stay for weeks on end, sometimes even longer. During such visits she would take possession of the keys and assume full charge of the house. Ivan Nikiforovich found this most unpleasant, although, surprisingly enough, he used to obey her like a child, and although he sometimes tried to argue, Agafya Fedoseyevna always got the upper hand.

I must confess I don't understand why things are so arranged that women should be able to take us by the nose as easily as a teapot by its handle. Either their hands are so formed, or our noses are simply no good for anything else. And for all that Ivan Ivanovich's nose was rather like a plum she still managed to seize hold of it and dragged him along like a dog by its lead. He even submitted to her will to the extent of changing his normal pattern of life: he spent less time lying in the sun, and when he did lie in the sun he no longer did so in the buff, but always put on a shirt and pair of trousers even though Agafya Fedoseyevna did not insist on this. She was not a great stickler for etiquette, and when Ivan Nikiforovich was running a fever she would rub him down with her own hands from head to foot with turpentine and vinegar. Agafya Fedoseyevna sported a lace bonnet on her head, three warts on her nose and a coffee-coloured peignoir with yellow flowers. Her figure was shaped like a tub, which meant that it was as hard to find her waist as it is to see one's nose without a mirror. Her legs were short and dumpy like two cushions. She liked to gossip and to eat boiled beetroot for breakfast, and swore with great flair—but during all these various activities her face never changed its expression one iota, a gift peculiar to women.

As soon as she arrived, everything started to go wrong.

"Now, Ivan Nikiforovich, don't you go making it up with him and don't ask his forgiveness: he wants to ruin you, he's that sort of man! You don't know what he's really like."

The old hag hissed on and on until Ivan Nikiforovich was filled with hatred for Ivan Ivanovich.

Everything changed for the worse: if the neighbours' dog

ventured into Ivan Nikiforovich's yard it was bombarded with whatever came to hand; any urchins who clambered over the fence would return bawling, holding up their shirts to reveal cane welts on their backs. Once, when Ivan Ivanovich ventured to ask her something, even the old woman gave vent to such an obscenity that Ivan Ivanovich, as a man of the utmost sensibility, spat and muttered: "Ugh! What a foul old woman! Worse than her master!"

But the last straw came when his odious neighbour, as if to compound the insult, erected a goose coop bang in front of him, where he used to climb over the fence. This coop, so repulsive to Ivan Ivanovich, was erected with diabolical rapidity in the course of a single day.

This inflamed Ivan Ivanovich and awoke in him a desire for revenge. He was careful, however, not to show his annoyance, even though the coop encroached onto his land; but his heart pounded so hard it was all he could do to maintain his outward composure.

One day passed. Night fell... Oh, if only I were a painter how I would love to paint that night in all its beauty! I would paint Mirgorod rapt in slumber; the firmament gazing down with its myriad motionless stars; the palpable silence interrupted by the distant and near barking of dogs; the sexton hastening past them to a love-tryst, climbing over a fence with the fearlessness of a knight; the moonlight making the white walls of the houses appear whiter still, the surrounding trees even darker, the shade of their branches blacker, and the flowers and quiet grass still more fragrant, while the crickets, those tireless cavaliers of the night, trill away on all sides in a chorus. I would paint a dark-eyed lady of the town in her lonely bed in one of these low, clay cottages dreaming, her young breasts a-tremble, of a Hussar's moustache and spurs, while the moonlight plays on her cheeks. I would paint the dark shadow of a bat flitting along the white road as its owner settles on the white chimneys... But I doubt I would be able to capture Ivan Ivanovich essaying forth under cover of this night with a saw in his hand. What a melange of emotions were written on his face! Stealthily he crept along and slunk under the goose coop. Ivan Nikiforovich's dogs had still not learnt about the quarrel between him and their master and thus let him, as an old friend, walk up to the coop, which stood on four

oaken posts; reaching the nearest of these he put his saw to it and set to work. The noise of the saw caused him to look round every few moments, but his nerve returned when he remembered the injury done him. The first post severed, he applied himself to the second. His eyes glowed feverishly and fear blinded him to his surroundings. Suddenly he uttered a cry and froze dead: he thought he had seen a ghost, but he soon recovered his composure on discovering that it was only a goose thrusting out its neck at him. Ivan Ivanovich spat with annoyance and continued his sawing. The second post was soon severed and the coop rocked to one side. His heart was pounding so violently when he turned to the third post that several times he had to stop; the post was half sawn through when the shaky structure gave a violent lurch... Ivan Ivanovich only just managed to leap aside as it crashed to the ground. Grabbing his saw he ran home in a fearful panic and collapsed on his bed, too terrified even to look out of the window at the results of his malefaction. It sounded to him as though Ivan Nikiforovich's entire household, the old woman, Ivan Nikiforovich and the boy in his immense coat, marshalled by Agafya Fedoseyevna, were all marching on his house armed with clubs and sticks and bent on destruction.

Ivan Ivanovich spent the whole of the next day in a fever of agitation. He kept on imagining that his hated neighbour would at the very least set fire to his house in revenge. He ordered Gapka to remain constantly on the lookout for traces of dry straw. Finally, he decided to take the wind out of Ivan Nikiforovich's sails by submitting a complaint about him to the Mirgorod district court. The contents of this complaint will be made apparent in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

IN WHICH WE LEARN WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MIRGOROD DISTRICT COURTHOUSE

Mirgorod is a lovely town! What fine buildings it boasts! And the roofs—some of thatch, some of reed, some even of clapboard; a street on the left, another on the right, fine wattle fences everywhere; some entwined with hops, pots hanging

from another, over them you can see the golden orbs of sunflowers, the red splashes of poppies, the occasional fat pumpkin... Fabulous! The fences are always adorned with various objects which add to their decorative effect: a dimity skirt, a shirt, or a pair of trousers spread out to air. Thieving and fraud are unknown in Mirgorod, so everyone hangs out whatever he likes on his fence. Should you venture into the square you will certainly stop to admire the view: in the middle of the square is a puddle, a most remarkable puddle! Quite unlike any puddle you have ever seen! It occupies almost the entire square. A splendid puddle! The houses around it, which from afar look like haystacks, marvel at its beauty.

But I am of the opinion that there is no finer building than the district courthouse. It matters little to me whether it be of oak or birch, but the main thing, my dear sirs, is that it boasts eight windows! Eight windows in a row, looking out on the square and on the expanse of water of which I have been talking and which the mayor calls a lake! This building is alone in being painted the colour of granite; all the other houses in Mirgorod are simply whitewashed. Its roof is made entirely of clapboard and would have been painted red had not the court clerks used all the thinning oil to fry onions, which they duly ate, this happening, to cap it all, during the lenten fast. As a result the roof remained unpainted. The courthouse is fronted by a porch, on which you can often see chickens, drawn there by the grain and other edible scraps scattered on its floor, the result, incidentally, of the petitioners' carelessness and not placed there on purpose. The building is divided into two wings: in one is the courthouse, in the other the jail. The wing containing the courthouse consists of two rooms, neat and whitewashed: a front room for the petitioners, and in the other a table liberally decorated with ink-stains. In addition there are four high-backed oak chairs and by the walls stand iron-studded trunks, storing bundles of complaints and petitions. At the time of our story a newly polished boot stood on one of these trunks. The court had been in session since early morning. The judge, a stoutish man, although not so fat as Ivan Nikiforovich, and with a jovial mien sat in his greasy dressing gown, pipe in hand, talking to his assistant and drinking tea. The judge's lips were situated immediately beneath his nose, which meant that he could sniff his upper lip

to his heart's content. This lip functioned as a snuff-box for him, because snuff addressed to his nostrils nearly always settled on it. Thus, the judge was talking to his assistant, and on one side stood a barefoot girl holding a tray of teacups.

At the end of the table stood the court secretary reading out the proceedings of a case, but in such a dreary voice that even the accused would have been lulled to sleep. The judge would without doubt have been the first to do this had he not been engaged meanwhile in a diverting conversation.

"I made special inquiries," he said, drinking his by now cold tea, "into what makes them sing so well. I had a fine thrush two years ago. And what do you know—it suddenly went haywire. Started singing God knows what. It got steadily worse and worse, croaking and rasping. Hopeless! But it was nothing serious after all. This is how it happens: a small swelling appears under the beak, smaller than a pea. All you have to do is pierce this swelling with a needle. Zakhar Prokofyevich showed me this trick, and if you like I'll tell you exactly how it came about: I went over to see him..."

"Does Your Honour require us to read another one?" interrupted the secretary, who had finished reading several minutes before.

"Have you read one already? Goodness, how quick! And I didn't hear a word of it! Well, where is it? Give it here and I'll sign it. What else have you got there?"

"Cossack Bokitko's case about the stolen cow."

"Good, read it! Well, as I was saying, I went to see him... I can even remember in detail what we had to eat. The vodka was served with smoked sturgeon, excellent stuff, too. And I don't mean that sturgeon" (on saying this the judge clicked his tongue and smiled, while his nose availed itself of its conveniently situated snuff-box) "they sell in our Mirgorod grocer's. I didn't eat any of the herring, because as you know yourself it gives me heartburn. But I sampled the caviare: excellent! No doubt about it, first-rate stuff! Then I drank some peach vodka, infused on ragwort. There was also some saffron vodka, but I don't drink saffron vodka, as you know. It's a good idea to get your appetite up, you know, makes you enjoy your meal so much more... Well I never, what a surprise!" the judge suddenly exclaimed, seeing Ivan Ivanovich enter the courtroom.

"May God bless you all! A very good morning to you!" pronounced Ivan Ivanovich, bowing to left and right in his customary pleasant way.

Goodness me, how he could charm everyone with his manners! Never before have I seen such finesse. He was fully conscious of his own merit and thus regarded the universal respect accorded him as his rightful due. The judge himself set forward a chair for Ivan Ivanovich, while his nose drew in all the remaining snuff from his upper lip, always a sign of extreme pleasure with him.

"What can we offer you in the way of refreshment, Ivan Ivanovich?" he inquired. "Would you perhaps take a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you most kindly," answered Ivan Ivanovich with a bow, and then sat down.

"I implore you, just one little cup!" repeated the judge.

"No, thank you. I'm most gratified by your hospitality," answered Ivan Ivanovich, bowed and sat down.

"Just one cup," insisted the judge.

"No, please do not trouble yourself, Demyan Demyanovich."

Whereupon Ivan Ivanovich bowed and sat down.

"A little cup?"

"Well, I suppose I could drink a little cup!" conceded Ivan Ivanovich, helping himself from the tray.

Heavens above! What infinite depths of finesse can be found in people! Words cannot describe the pleasant sensation produced by such actions!

"Could we not tempt you with another cup?"

"Thank you most humbly, no," answered Ivan Ivanovich, placing the cup upside down on the tray and bowing.

"Do us the kindness, Ivan Ivanovich!"

"I'm sorry, I cannot. Most obliged." Whereupon Ivan Ivanovich bowed and sat down.

"Ivan Ivanovich, in the name of our friendship, just one cup!"

"No thank you, most obliged for your kind attentions."

Saying this Ivan Ivanovich bowed and sat down.

"Only one little cup! One cup!"

Ivan Ivanovich stretched out his hand and took another cup from the tray.

God in heaven! How is it possible for anyone to preserve his dignity so perfectly!

"Demyan Demyanovich," announced Ivan Ivanovich, draining his cup, "I have come to you on a matter of serious business: I am submitting a plaint." Saying this Ivan Ivanovich put down his cup and removed from his pocket a sheet of crested note-paper covered with writing. "A plaint against my enemy, my cursed enemy."

"Now who might that be?"

"Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkhun."

On hearing this the judge all but fell off his chair.

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands. "Ivan Ivanovich! is it really you?"

"As you can see for yourself, it is me."

"May the good Lord and all the saints be with you! What next! You mean, you, Ivan Ivanovich, are now the enemy of Ivan Nikiforovich? Do I hear that from your own lips? Just say it again! Is there not perhaps someone hidden behind you saying these words for you?..."

"What do you find so improbable about it? I cannot bear to look at him; he has caused me a mortal insult, he has offended my honour."

"Holy Trinity! How can I break it to my old mother? Every day the old lady tells me, as soon as I start quarrelling with my sister: 'It's like cats and dogs the way you two go on. You should take a lesson from Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich. That's what real friends should be like! They're exemplary people!' And now these friends have come to this! Tell me, what's all this about, then?"

"It's a delicate business, Demyan Demyanovich, you couldn't put it into words. Perhaps, if you'd be so kind as to read my petition."

"Read it out, Taras Tikhonovich!" said the judge, turning to the secretary.

Taras Tikhonovich took the petition and blowing his nose in the manner favoured by all district court secretaries, with the assistance of two fingers, started to read:

"From gentleman of the Mirgorod district and landowner Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko this heretofore petition, which concerns the following points:

"1) gentleman Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun, well

known to all the world for his blasphemous malfeasance, a source of repugnance and heinous beyond measure, on July the seventh of this the 1810th year of Our Lord, did unto me a mortal insult, having regard both to my own personal honour and to equal extent the humiliation and shame of my rank and family. The said gentleman, being furthermore of the most repellent aspect, has a contumelious character and is replete with every manner of blasphemy and vile oaths!..."

At this point the reader paused in order to blow his nose again, while the judge reverently clasped his hands and only said to himself: "What a sharp turn of phrase! Heavens above! How that man can write!"

Ivan Ivanovich asked him to read on and Taras Tikhonovich continued:

"The said gentleman, Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun, when I called upon him with a friendly proposition, publicly reviled me with a name both offensive and injurious to my honour, to wit: a *goose*, although as all the district of Mirgorod can vouch, I have never had the name of this revolting creature and do not intend to adopt such an appelation. As proof of my entitlement to the rank of gentleman I may refer you to the register of births that is held in the church of the *Three Holy Bishops*, in which both the date of my birth is recorded and the name with which I was christened. The name *goose*, as everyone knows who is at all conversant with the sciences, cannot be recorded in the register of births, for a goose is not a man but a bird; which fact is cognoscible to anyone, whether they have studied in a seminary or not. But the same malevolent gentleman, albeit conversant with the above intelligence, did, for no other purpose than to cause me mortal insult on my rank and calling, abuse me with the aforesaid repulsive epithet.

"2) This same disreputable and indecent gentleman did furthermore encroach upon my own property, my birthright inherited by me from my father, a gentleman in holy orders, Ivan son of Onisy Pererepenko of blessed memory, by erecting, in defiance of all the laws, a goose coop directly opposite my own porch, a project undertaken with no other purpose than to compound the injury already done me, for the said coop hitherto occupied a suitable site and was sufficiently sturdy. But the obnoxious intention of the aforesaid gentleman consisted exclusively in rendering me the witness of indecorous

proceedings: for it is a well-known fact that no person will enter such a coop, particularly a goose coop, for anything other than an indecent purpose. In the course of this illegal undertaking the two front posts infringed upon my own land, made over to me during his own lifetime by my father, Ivan son of Onisy Pererepenko of blessed memory, which extends in a straight line from the barn to that very spot where women wash the pots.

"3) The aforementioned gentleman, whose very name evokes the utmost repugnance, has now conceived the malicious design of setting fire to my house during my occupation thereof. As convincing substantiation of which I submit the following evidence: first: the same malevolent gentleman has started to make frequent sallies from his domicile, something he has never before undertaken by reason of his sloth and repulsive obesity of body; secondly: in his servants' quarters, which abut on the fence bounding my own property, inherited from my late father of blessed memory, Ivan son of Onisy Pererepenko, a light can be seen burning nightly and with unprecedented duration, which is patent proof of the above allegation, for hitherto, by reason of his base miserliness, not only the tallow candle but also the small oil lamp was promptly extinguished.

"Therefore do I request the said gentleman Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkhun, being culpable of contemplated arson, of insulting my rank, name and family and of a predatory misappropriation of my land, but worse of all of a vile and reprehensible annexation to my name of the epithet *goose*, to suffer payment of a fine, to be rendered liable for the incurred expenses and damages, and that the same gentleman, in his capacity as felon, be clapped in leg-irons, and thus subdued, conveyed to the town prison, and that due consideration be given this my petition forthwith and without delay. As composed and committed to writing by landowner and gentleman of Mirgorod Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko."

On completion of the reading the judge leaned over to Ivan Ivanovich, took him by one of his coat buttons and addressed him in roughly the following fashion:

"What on earth are you doing, Ivan Ivanovich? Have you no fear of God?! Forget this petition, throw it away! To the devil with it! Instead go and shake Ivan Nikiforovich's hand,

embrace one another, buy a bottle of Santorin or some Nikopol wine, or simply brew some of your own punch, and send for me! We'll have a nice drink and forget the whole thing!"

"No, Demyan Demyanovich, this is not something which can be forgotten," said Ivan Ivanovich in the dignified manner that always suited him so well. "This is not the sort of thing that can be settled with a friendly handshake. Farewell! Farewell, to you, gentlemen!" he added with the same gravity, addressing the assembled company. "I hope that my petition will receive the appropriate attention." Whereupon he took his leave, leaving the entire courtroom in consternation.

The judge sat in stunned silence; the secretary took some snuff; the court clerks knocked over the end of a broken bottle that served as their inkwell, and the judge himself distractedly spread the puddle of ink over the table with his finger.

"So what do you say to that, Dorofey Trofimovich?" he enquired of his assistant after a long pause.

"Nothing," answered the assistant.

"I ask you, what goings-on!" continued the judge.

No sooner had he said this than the door creaked and opened to admit the anterior half of Ivan Nikiforovich. The posterior half remained in the anteroom. The appearance of Ivan Nikiforovich in, of all places, the courtroom was so extraordinary that the judge cried out and the secretary stopped his reading. One of the clerks, attired in a serge apology of a dress coat, put the end of his pen in his mouth; another swallowed a fly. Even the invalid responsible for discharging the duties of courier and watchman, who until now had stood in the doorway scratching himself under his filthy shirt with a patch on its shoulder, on hearing this opened his mouth wide and stood on someone's foot.

"Well I never! To what do we owe the honour? How is your health, Ivan Nikiforovich?"

But Ivan Nikiforovich was in no state to answer him, because he had become jammed in the doorway and could move neither forwards nor backwards. The judge shouted into the anteroom for someone there to push Ivan Nikiforovich into the courtroom, but his appeal was to no avail, for the only person in the anteroom was an old lady petitioner. Even with all the strength in her bony arms she was unable to budge him.

Then one of the court clerks, a broad-shouldered fellow with thick lips and a fat nose, cross-eyed and drunken looking, with holey elbows, stepped up to the anterior half of Ivan Nikiforovich, crossed his arms on his chest like a baby's, and motioned to the old invalid, who positioned his foot in Ivan Ivanovich's belly and despite the latter's pitiable groans the two of them squeezed him back into the anteroom. Then they threw back the bolts and opened the second half of the double door. The clerk and his assistant, the invalid, created such an overwhelming miasma with their breath during these benevolent activities that the courtroom temporarily took on the semblance of a public house.

"They did not injure you, I hope, Ivan Nikiforovich? If so I'll tell my mother, and she'll send you some infusion which you just rub on your back and you'll feel quite better."

But Ivan Nikiforovich collapsed on a chair, unable to utter anything but a series of long gasps. Finally he ventured in a faint voice, barely audible with fatigue:

"Would you like some of this?" and, taking his snuff horn from his pocket added: "Here, help yourself!"

"Very pleased to see you," replied the judge. "But I cannot imagine, all the same, what can have caused you to take the trouble of giving us such an agreeable surprise."

"I have a complaint..." was all Ivan Nikiforovich could get out.

"A complaint? What complaint?"

"A complaint..." Here there ensued a long pause while he recovered his breath. "Ohh! ... a complaint against that scoundrel ... against Ivan Ivanovich Pererepenko."

"Lord! not you too! And you're such staunch friends! A complaint against such a beneficent man!.."

"He's Satan himself!" blurted out Ivan Nikiforovich.

The judge crossed himself.

"Here, take this petition and read it."

"There's nothing for it, you'll have to read it, Taras Tikhonovich," said the judge, turning to the secretary with a look of displeasure, while his nostrils inadvertently addressed themselves to his upper lip, an action that with him usually betokened his great pleasure. This wilful conduct by his nose even further discountenanced the judge. He took out his handker-

chief and wiped all the snuff from his upper lip, as a punishment for his nose's audacity.

The secretary, having gone through the motions he customarily performed before commencing any reading, and again without the help of a handkerchief, began in his usual voice to read as follows:

"Petition submitted by gentleman of the Mirgorod district Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun on the points stated hereinafter:

"1) By reason of his odious enmity and patent malevolence, self-styled gentleman Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko is occasioning me all manner of damage, iniquity and other pernicious and horrifying deeds, and yesterday postmeridiem, armed with axes, saws, chisels and other joinery tools like a robber and thief, made his way under cover of night into my yard and entered a hut which stands in the said yard being my own property, which he proceeded with his own hands and in the most iniquitous manner to destroy. I, for my own part, had not provoked in any way this most illegal and criminal act.

"2) The said gentleman Pererepenko has designs on my very life and prior to the 7th day of last month nursing these heinous stratagems in secret he came to me and began soliciting me in a friendly and cunning fashion for my gun, which is kept in my room, and with his innate stinginess offered me in exchange many useless items, to wit: a brown pig and two bushels of oats. But at once divining his criminal intentions I tried to declined his offer in every possible way; but the said rogue and swindler Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko abused me in a low and common fashion and since then has harboured an irreconciable hatred towards me. Furthermore, this same abovementioned violent gentleman and thief Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko is of the most disreputable origins: his sister was well known to all as a trollop, she went off after a company of chausseurs who were stationed in Mirgorod five years ago; then she had her husband registered as a serf. His mother and father were also the worst sort of outlaws, and both were indescribable drunkards. This aforesaid gentleman and bandit Pererepenko surpasses all his kinfolk for bestiality and nefarious doings, and performs the most iniquitious acts under the guise of piety: he does not keep the fasts, for at the

commencement of Advent this blasphemer bought a sheep and the very next day instructed his lawless wench Gapka to slaughter it, making out that at that particular time he needed fat for the oil lamps and candles.

"For this reason I request that the said gentleman, as criminal, sacrilegist and brigand, already found guilty of theft and robbery, be clapped in irons and conveyed to the prison or state dungeon and there, in fulfilment of the sentence to be deprived of his rank and privileges as a gentlemen, given a sound flogging and sent into penal servitude in Siberia for as long as is thought fit; that he be directed to pay costs and damages and that a decision be reached on this my complaint. Signed this day by gentleman of the Mirgorod district Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun."

As soon as the secretary had finished reading this out, Ivan Nikiforovich took up his hat and bowed, indicating his intention of departing.

"Where are you going, Ivan Nikiforovich?" called the judge after him. "Sit with us for a little while! Have a cup of tea! Oryshko! What are you doing standing there, you stupid girl? Stop making eyes at the court clerks and bring a cup of tea!"

But Ivan Nikiforovich, seriously alarmed at having ventured so far from his home and subjecting himself to such perilous exposure to the elements, had by now made it through the door and excused himself: "Please don't trouble, I'm deeply gratified..." and closed the door, leaving behind him a scene of general consternation.

There was nothing to be done about it. Both petitions had been accepted and the whole affair looked like taking on a rather serious aspect when one curious circumstance gave it an additional intriguing twist. When the judge left the courtroom accompained by his assistant and secretary, and the court clerks started gathering in a sack all the chickens, eggs, loaves of bread, pies, pancakes and such-like rubbish brought by the petitioners, at this very moment a brown pig hurtled into the room and, to the great astonishment of these present, grabbed not a pie, or a loaf of bread, but Ivan Nikiforovich's petition, which was lying at the edge of the table, its pages hanging loose over the side. Seizing hold of the paper the brown porker streaked out of the room so swiftly that the clerks were unable

to arrest its flight, despite the number of rulers and inkwells they threw at it.

This extraordinary occurrence provoked a terrible rumpus because no copy had been made of the abducted document. The judge, or rather his secretary and assistant, debated this unheard-of contingency at length; finally a decision was reached, namely: that a report should be written about this to the mayor, since investigation into this business was more the responsibility of the police. Report No. 389 was dispatched to the mayor later that day, and later on, still on the same day a rather curious sequel to these incidents took place, about which our readers will learn in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

IN WHICH IS DESCRIBED THE CONFERENCE OF TWO RESPECTED CITIZENS OF MIRGOROD

No sooner had Ivan Ivanovich completed his domestic affairs and in accordance with habit repaired to the porch for a nap than he espied to his indescribable astonishment something red gleaming in the gateway. This was the red lapel of the mayor's uniform, which, like his collar, was subjected to much rubbing and along its edges had acquired the semblance of shiny red leather. Ivan Ivanovich thought to himself: "How nice that Pyotr Fyodorovich should have come along for a chat", but was then very surprised to see that the mayor was striding along most purposefully and swinging his arms, an extremely rare phenomenon with him. The mayor's uniform sported eight buttons, the ninth having become detached during the procession to mark the consecration of the church some two years previously, and successfully defied the attempts of the police force to find it, although the mayor invariably inquired during the daily reports made by the district police inspectors whether the button had been found. These eight buttons were planted on his coat in the way that country women plant a row of beans: one on the right, one on the left... His left leg had received a bullet wound during the last campaign causing him to limp with such a pronounced lurch to the side that it almost completely undid all the work done by

his right leg. The more vigorously the mayor urged his infantry onward the slower it advanced. Thus, during the time it took the mayor to make his way to the porch, Ivan Ivanovich became lost in speculation as to why the mayor was swinging his arms with such unwonted vigour. He became all the more convinced of the extreme importance of the mayor's mission when he observed the new sword hanging at his side.

"Good evening, Pyotr Fyodorovich!" called Ivan Ivanovich, who, as we have already noted, was of an extremely curious disposition and was unable to control his impatience watching the mayor take the porch by storm, all the while keeping his eyes down and rebuking his infantry, which found it quite impossible to ascend the step in a single sortie.

"Good evening to you too, kind friend and benefactor Ivan Ivanovich!" answered the mayor.

"Pray do me the honour of taking a seat. I can see that you are tired, for you have been having trouble with your game leg..."

"My leg!" exclaimed the mayor, casting at Ivan Ivanovich a look such as a giant casts at a pigmy, or a learned pedant at a dancing teacher. He stretched out his leg and stamped it on the floor. This fearless act, however, cost him dear, for his entire body rocked to one side and his nose collided with the banister; but the wise guardian of law and order, anxious to preserve his dignity, at once righted himself and reached into his pocket, as if in order to find his snuff-box. "I might tell you, my most dear friend and benefactor Ivan Ivanovich, that is nothing compared to some of the campaigns I've seen in my time. Nothing at all, I can assure you. Take the 1807 campaign, for example... Wait till you hear the story of how I climbed over a fence to visit a pretty German lass." At this point the mayor winked and leered roguishly at Ivan Ivanovich.

"Where have you been today, though?" inquired Ivan Ivanovich, anxious to halt the mayor's train of reminiscences and get him back to the purpose of his visit; what he really wanted was to ask point-blank about the purpose of the mayor's visit, but his fine sense of wordly etiquette warned him of the unseemliness of such a procedure. Ivan Ivanovich was forced to suppress his curiosity and await enlightenment, while his heart started to thump violently.

"Well, if you'll allow me I shall tell you where I've been," replied the mayor. "Firstly, let me inform you that the weather today is quite splendid."

On hearing this intelligence Ivan Ivanovich all but passed out.

"But do you know," continued the mayor, "I have come to see you today on an extremely important matter." Here the mayor's face took on the same expression of concern it had worn during his storming of the porch.

Ivan Ivanovich swiftly revived and began to tremble feverishly, and at once inquired with his customary promptness:

"What important matter? Is it really important?"

"Well, if you'll allow me, first of all I shall make so bold as to inform you, my dear friend and benefactor Ivan Ivanovich, that you ... you see, it matters nothing to me, but it's the statutes of government, do you see, the statutes of government demand it: you've violated the rules of law and order!"

"What are you saying, Pyotr Fyodorovich? I don't understand a word of it."

"But my dear Ivan Ivanovich! How can you not understand? Your very own animal stole an extremely important official document, and here you are telling me that you don't understand a word!"

"What animal?"

"If you'll allow me to tell you, it was your own brown pig."

"So why blame me? Why does the courthouse watchman leave the doors open?"

"But, Ivan Ivanovich, it was your own animal—which means that it's your fault."

"Well, thank you most kindly: so I'm to be identified with a pig."

"Now I didn't say that, Ivan Ivanovich! As God's my witness, I did not! Please judge for yourself, in all honesty: you must surely know that the town authorities prohibit unclean animals from being left at large anywhere in the town, let alone the main streets. You must agree that it's against the law."

"What on earth are you on about! As if it matters that a pig runs out onto the road!"

"Allow me to inform you, please allow me, Ivan Ivanovich, it is quite out of the question. It can't be helped: the authorities

want it that way and we have to obey. I don't dispute that chickens and geese sometimes run out onto the street and even into the square, but see for yourself: only chickens and geese. As for pigs and goats I issued a special ruling last year that they were not to be allowed out onto the public squares. And I therewith gave instructions for this edict to be read out loud at a public assembly attended by the whole populace."

"No, Pyotr Fyodorovich, all the sense I can make of this is that you are doing your utmost to offend me."

"Now one thing you can't say, my dearest friend and benefactor, is that I'm trying to offend you. Allow me to remind you: I never said a word to you last year when you raised your roof an entire cubit above the permitted height. On the contrary, I even pretended not to have noticed. Believe me, my dear friend, that on this occasion, too, I would gladly ... but it is my duty, my obligation to ensure that the place is kept clean. I mean, judge for yourself, if you can suddenly meet on the main street—"

"Now don't try and tell me your streets are spick and span! All the housewives throw their rubbish out onto them."

"Allow me to inform you, Ivan Ivanovich, that you are now offending me! You do see litter sometimes, but it's mostly thrown only under the fence, or by sheds and barns, but as for a sow in farrow barging into the street, that's quite a different kettle of fish..."

"But what's so terrible about it, Pyotr Fyodorovich! After all, a pig is one of God's creatures!"

"Agreed! It is a well-known fact that you are a learned man, versed in the sciences and other diverse matters. Of course I myself am quite ignorant in the sciences: I only started to learn joined writing at the age of thirty. As you know, I came up from the ranks."

"Hm!" grunted Ivan Ivanovich.

"Yes," continued the mayor, "in 1801 I was serving in the 42nd Chausseurs as a lieutenant in the fourth company. Our company commander, if you're interested to know, was Captain Yeremeyev." At this point the mayor dipped his fingers into the snuff-box which Ivan Ivanovich was holding open while he crumbled the snuff inside it.

Ivan Ivanovich answered:

"Hm."

"But it is my duty," continued the mayor, "to obey the orders of the government. Do you know, Ivan Ivanovich, that the abduction of an official document from the courthouse is a criminal offence punishable by law?"

"I do indeed, and I can tell you something more, if you wish. This is the position with regard to people, to you, for example, should you steal a document; but a pig is an animal, one of God's creatures!"

"Be that as it may, the law states: the party guilty of abduction ... might I ask you to take careful note: the *guilty* party! Without any indication of species, sex or title—it follows from this that an animal can be guilty too. Say what you like, but before a sentence can be passed on it the animal must be handed into the custody of the police as a disturber of the peace."

"No, Pyotr Fyodorovich!" objected Ivan Ivanovich in a composed voice. "It cannot be!"

"As you wish, but I have to follow the instructions of the authorities."

"Are you trying to intimidate me? I suppose you want to send your one-armed soldier round to arrest it? If you do I'll tell my housegirl to chase him off with a poker. He'll get his other arm broken too."

"I shall not presume to argue with you. Should you not be willing to hand it over to the police, do what you like with it: slaughter it for Christmas, if you wish, and turn it into smoked ham, or eat it as it is. I've only one request to make of you: if you're going to make pork sausages, would you send me a couple of those black puddings that your Gapka makes so well. My Agrafena Trofimovna is very fond of them."

"Very well, I'll send a couple of black puddings."

"Much obliged to you, my dear friend and benefactor. Now allow me to add one more thing: I have a mission from both the judge and all our friends: to bring about a reconciliation between you and your great friend Ivan Nikiforovich."

"What! With that lout? You want to reconcile me with that boor? Never! Over my dead body!" Ivan Ivanovich clearly felt very strongly on the subject.

"As you will," answered the mayor, treating both nostrils to a pinch of snuff. "I personally would not presume to offer

you advice; but allow me to point out that you're having a bit of a tiff just now, but once you've made up..."

But Ivan Ivanovich had started talking about shooting quails, a favourite ruse of his when he wished to change the subject.

Thus the mayor was forced to repair home, his mission unfulfilled.

Chapter Six

FROM WHICH THE READER WILL EASILY ASCERTAIN ALL THAT IS CONTAINED THEREIN

Despite all the efforts made to hush the affair up, the very next day all Mirgorod knew that Ivan Ivanovich's pig had stolen Ivan Nikiforovich's petition. The mayor himself was the first to forget himself and let the cat out of the bag. When Ivan Nikiforovich was informed of the mishap he made no comment, only asking: "The brown one, was it?"

But Agafya Fedoseyevna, who happened to be present, started to nag Ivan Nikiforovich again:

"Now really, Ivan Nikiforovich! You'll be the laughing stock of the town if you let them get away with it! How can you call yourself a gentleman after this? You'll be worse than the old woman who sells those doughnuts you're so fond of."

And she talked him round, the harridan! She dug up a ratty little man, middle-aged, with a dark, blotchy face, clad in a dingy blue coat with patched elbows—a veritable inkwell of a clerk! He smeared pitch over his boots, carried three pens behind each ear and a small glass bottle tied to his button, which served him as an inkwell; he could eat up to nine pies at a sitting, secreting the tenth in his pocket, and was able to fit so much calumny onto a single sheet of crested paper that no court reader could manage it at one go, without punctuating the reading with much coughing and sneezing. This undersized apology for a man scribbled and scratched away and finally concocted the following document:

"To the Mirgorod District Court from gentleman Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun.

"In pursuance of my former petition, which is to say emanating from me, gentleman Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun, appertaining to that same business, to which, in collusion with the gentleman Ivan, son of Ivan, Pererepenko, the very District Court of Mirgorod has expressed its connivance. And the aforesaid impudence and contumacy of a brown pig, covertly manifested and only brought to my ears through those indirectly concerned. Such collusion and connivance being blatantly premeditated renders the court itself liable to amercement; for the said pig is a stupid animal and capable of abducting documents notwithstanding. Thereanent it being patently clear that the frequently aforementioned pig was none other than incited to this by the culpable party, who answers to the description of Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko, already impeachable of banditry, attempted murder and sacrilege. But the said Mirgorod Court, with its customary prejudice entered into a clandestine collusion without which collusion the said pig would never have been allowed to effect the abduction of the document: for the Mirgorod District Court is thoroughly equipped with staff, it being sufficient for our purposes to name one soldier, to be found at any time in the anteroom, who, although possessed of one wall eye and a somewhat damaged arm, has perfectly adequate capabilities for the expulsion of a pig and the wallopping of it with a stout stick. Wherefrom we cannot but deduce the connivance of said Mirgorod Court and the indisputable sharing of the ill-gotten lucre therewith resulting amongst those complicit in the undertaking. The same aforesaid brigand and gentleman Ivan son of Ivan Pererepenko subsists in dire opprobrium anent the said nefarious doings, whenceforth am I, gentleman Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun, duly notifying the said District Court, that unless the petition in question be estreated from the said brown pig or the gentleman Pererepenko therewith colluding, and a ruling passed in that behalf that is just and advantageous to me, I, gentleman Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun, intend to lodge a complaint about the same to the regional assizes with the appropriate transmutation of the case. Signed gentleman of the Mirgorod district Ivan son of Nikifor Dovgochkhun."

This petition had the desired effect: the judge was a man of a cowardly disposition, as most kindhearted people usually

are. He turned to his secretary. But the secretary hummed grimly through pursed lips while his face took on an expression of such callous indifference as one would expect to find on the face of Satan, eyeing a victim crawling at his feet. There was only one way out: to effect a reconciliation between the two friends. But how was this to be accomplished when all attempts hitherto had been in vain? Nonetheless, another try was made, but Ivan Ivanovich rebuffed it in no uncertain terms and even flew into a rage. Ivan Nikiforovich turned his back on the peacemakers without deigning to say a word. Then the case advanced with the extraordinary rapidity that is characteristic of court proceedings. The petitions were marked, registered, numbered, sewn together, signed—all in the same day—and the case was then put away in a cupboard where it lay, and lay, and lay—for a year, two years, three years. Many a young bride went to the altar, a new street was laid in Mirgorod, the judge lost one molar and two canines; more urchins than ever before could be seen scampering about Ivan Ivanovich's yard; God alone knows where they all came from; Ivan Nikiforovich, to spite Ivan Ivanovich, built a new goose coop, albeit a little further away than the first one, and completely blocked himself from Ivan Ivanovich's view, so that these worthy people almost never saw one another any more—and their case mouldered, in the very best condition, in its cupboard, which began to look like marble from the profusion of ink blots on its surface.

Meanwhile an extremely important event took place in the life of Mirgorod.

The mayor gave a dinner party! Where will I find the brushes and paints necessary to depict the dazzling colours of the gathering and the magnificence of the board? Take a timepiece, open it up and have a look inside! What a fearful gallimaufry! Now imagine almost the same number of wheels, if not even more, crowding the mayor's garden. What a profusion of traps and carriages! Some were broad in the beam, and narrow at the helm; others narrow in the beam and broad at the helm; one was a cross between trap and cart, next to it one seemed to be neither trap nor cart, another looked like an enormous haystack or a fat merchant's wife; one looked like a dishevelled Jew or a skeleton with shreds of skin still attached to the bone, another in profile was the spitting image of a long

clay pipe; a third was quite unlike anything on earth, with a weird and fantastic shape. From the midst of all this chaos of wheels and coach-boxes protruded something like a carriage with a sash window divided by a thick transom. Coachmen clad in brown waistcoats, doublets and long grey coats, sporting sheepskin hats and peaked caps of various descriptions, with pipes in their hands, walked their horses around the yard. What a marvellous dinner party the mayor had given! If you will allow me I shall list all those present: Taras Tarasovich, Evpl Akinfovich, Evtikhy Evtikhievich, Ivan Ivanovich—not *the* Ivan Ivanovich, another one, Savva Gavrilovich, our Ivan Ivanovich, Elevfery Elevferevich, Makar Nazaryevich, Foma Grigoryevich... I cannot continue! I haven't the strength! My hand is tired of writing! And what a constellation of ladies! dark and fair, tall and short, some as fat as Ivan Nikiforovich, and others so slender that they could have been concealed in the mayor's scabbard. What bonnets, what dresses!—red, yellow, coffee-coloured, green, blue, new, turned, re-fashioned, and the scarves, ribbons and reticules! Farewell, wretched eyes! You will be no use to anyone after beholding this spectacle! And what a long table had been set out! And what a din arose when the tongues were loosened! The windmill has nothing on this, for all its millstones, wheels, gears and mortars! I cannot tell you exactly what they were talking about, but we may suppose it was about many agreeable and useful things, such as: the weather, dogs, wheat, bonnets, stallions. Finally Ivan Ivanovich—not our Ivan Ivanovich but the other one, with the wall eye, said:

"I find it very odd that my right eye (wall-eyed Ivan Ivanovich always spoke about himself with irony) does not see Ivan Nikiforovich Dovgochkhun."

"He didn't want to come!" said the mayor.

"Why not?"

"Well it's now, praise be to God, two years since they fell out, Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich, that is, and where the one is, wild horses would not drag the other!"

"Well, I never!" Whereupon wall-eyed Ivan Ivanovich raised his eyes and clasped his hands. "Has it really come to such a pass: if even people with two good eyes cannot live in peace, how am I to get by with my squint!"

This was met with a gale of hearty laughter. Wall-eyed

Ivan Ivanovich was well-loved for his skill at telling all the latest jokes. A tall, thin man dressed in a flannelette coat, with a plaster on his nose, who until now had sat in a corner without once so much as twitching a muscle on his face, not even when a fly flew straight into his nose, now rose from his seat and moved closer to the crowd which had gathered around Ivan Ivanovich.

"Listen!" called wall-eyed Ivan Ivanovich, seeing that a substantial crowd had collected around him. "Listen to this! Instead of standing there staring at my wall eye, why don't you all try and reconcile our two old friends! At this moment Ivan Ivanovich is chatting with the lady guests, so let's quietly send for Ivan Nikiforovich and have them come face to face with each other."

Ivan Ivanovich's proposal met with unanimous approval. It was decided to send at once for Ivan Nikiforovich and ask him to drop everything and betake himself to the mayor's for dinner. But they were nonplussed by the big question: Who was to carry out this responsible mission? They argued at length as to who was most skilled in the arts of diplomacy, and finally agreed as one man to entrust the undertaking to Anton Prokofyevich Golopuz.

First of all we should acquaint the reader a little with this remarkable character. Anton Prokofyevich was an utterly virtuous man in the fullest sense of the word: should one of the worthy citizens of Mirgorod give him a neckscarf or a pair of trousers he would thank them; should someone give him a light fillip on the nose, he would thank them too. If he were asked: "How come, Anton Prokofyevich, you're wearing a brown coat with blue sleeves?" his customary answer would be, "Why, yours is no match for mine! Just wait, when it gets worn in it'll all become the same colour!" And he was right, too: in the sunlight the two colours faded until the blue was indistinguishable from the brown. But the oddest thing was Anton Prokofyevich's habit of wearing a worsted suit in the summer and nankeen in the winter. Anton Prokofyevich did not have a house of his own. He used to have one at the end of the town, but he sold this and spent the money on three bays and a small trap, in which he travelled around visiting local landowners. But since the horses needed a lot of care and in addition he had to spend money on oats, Anton Prokofyevich

swapped them for a violin and a serving girl, receiving in addition a twenty-five ruble note. Then Anton Prokofyevich sold the violin and swapped the girl for a morocco leather-and-gold tobacco pouch. As a result he had a tobacco pouch that quite surpassed anyone else's. This gratification was bought at the cost of his visits to outlying estates, and meant he now had to stay in town and spend the nights in different houses, particularly the houses of those gentlemen who found it amusing to give him fillips on the nose. Anton Prokofyevich was very fond of his food, and a dab hand at cards. By nature always willing to obey, when charged with this mission he at once took up his hat and stick and set off. But as he walked he began to wonder how he was to lure Ivan Nikiforovich to the dinner party. The rather truculent manner of his otherwise worthy fellow-citizen rendered this undertaking almost completely hopeless. How, indeed, could he be expected to make his way to the mayor's house when rising from his bed entailed such a great effort? But supposing he did rise: would he go to a house where, as he undoubtedly knew, he would find his irreconcilable enemy? The more Anton Prokofyevich thought about it the more difficult it seemed. The day was oppressive; the sun beat down and sweat poured from his brow. Anton Prokofyevich, for all that he let people fillip his nose, was in many respects quite an astute man—just rather unlucky in his business transactions—and he was well aware when it was useful to act the fool, often able to keep his head in situations that would have confounded many a more intelligent man.

While his resourceful mind was busy devising a stratagem to convince Ivan Nikiforovich, which he was already resolved to put to the test, come what may, an unexpected circumstance rather put him off his stride. It would be apposite at this juncture to inform the reader that Anton Prokofyevich had, amongst others, one pair of trousers with the strange property that they awoke in any passing dog a desire to bite his calves. As bad luck would have it he was wearing precisely these trousers that day. And so, in the midst of these cogitations his ears were assailed by the most fearful barking on all sides. Anton Prokofyevich let out such a bellow—and no one could shout as loudly as Anton Prokofyevich—that it brought running out not only the above-mentioned old woman and resident of the voluminous frock coat, but even the urchins from Ivan Ivanov-

ich's yard, and although the dogs only managed to bite one of his legs, this considerably diminished his enthusiasm for his mission, and it was with a certain feeling of apprehension that he approached the porch.

Chapter the Seventh

AND LAST

"Ah! good day to you. Why are you annoying the dogs?" said Ivan Nikiforovich, when he saw his visitor, because no one could ever refrain from chaffing Anton Prokofyevich.

"I hope the lot of them drop dead! Who's annoying them, anyway?" answered Anton Prokofyevich.

"You are, of course."

"I'm not, I swear to God. Pyotr Fyodorovich asks you to join him for dinner."

"Hm."

"As true as God! and he was extremely insistent about it. How come, he says, Ivan Nikiforovich's shunning me like his enemy? Never calls in for a chat these days, he says."

Ivan Nikiforovich stroked his chin.

"If, he says, Ivan Nikiforovich won't come this time either I'll not know what to think: it must mean he has a chip on his shoulder! Do me a favour, Anton Prokofyevich, he says, go and talk Ivan Nikiforovich round! What about it, Ivan Nikiforovich? let's go! there's a splendid crowd there already!"

Ivan Nikiforovich was peering at the rooster which had climbed onto the porch and was crowing at the top of its voice.

"Ivan Nikiforovich," continued the zealous deputy, "you should see the sturgeon and fresh caviare that Pyotr Fyodorovich is laying on!"

At this Ivan Nikiforovich cocked his head and pricked up his ears with interest.

This encouraged the deputy.

"Let's get going, Foma Grigoryevich's there too! Well, come on!" he added, seeing that Ivan Nikiforovich remained lying in the same position. "Are we going or aren't we?"

"I won't."

This "won't" stunned Anton Prokofyevich. He was sure

that his persuasive presentation of the facts had completely won over his listener. However, far from consenting, this worthy gentleman was declaring in no uncertain terms: "I won't."

"What do you mean you won't?" he asked with something like annoyance, an emotion he rarely displayed, even when burning paper was put on his head, a favourite joke of the judge's and mayor's.

Ivan Nikiforovich took a pinch of snuff.

"Really, Ivan Nikiforovich, I can't understand what's stopping you."

"Why should I go?" announced Ivan Nikiforovich at last. "That brigand will be there!" This was how he usually referred to Ivan Ivanovich.

All-merciful God! And to think that a mere two years ago...

"He won't, I swear to God! As God's in His heaven, I swear he won't be there! May God strike me dead if I lie!" protested Anton Prokofyevich, prepared to swear until he was blue in the face. "Do come on, Ivan Nikiforovich!"

"You're lying, Anton Prokofyevich, are you sure he's not there?"

"I swear it, as God is my witness he isn't! May I never rise from this spot again, if he is! And judge for yourself, why should I want to lie to you? May my arms and legs wither!... Well, do you believe me now? May I rot away before your eyes! may the gates of heaven be closed to my father, my mother and myself! You still don't believe me?"

Ivan Nikiforovich was quite convinced by these assurances and called his manservant of the voluminous frock coat to bring his trousers and nankeen caftan.

I submit that it is quite superfluous to describe the manner in which Ivan Nikiforovich drew on his trousers, how his cravat was knotted round his neck for him and how he was helped into his caftan, which had burst its seams under the left sleeve. Suffice it to say that throughout these operations he preserved his decorous composure and did not utter a word in reply to Anton Prokofyevich's offer to swap his Turkish tobacco pouch for some item in Ivan Nikiforovich's possession.

Meanwhile the assembled company awaited with impatience the decisive moment when Ivan Nikiforovich would

arrive and these two worthy people might be reconciled with one another to everyone's satisfaction; many were almost certain that Ivan Nikiforovich would not come. The mayor even offered a wager to wall-eyed Ivan Ivanovich, but the wager was not struck because squint-eyed Ivan Ivanovich insisted that the mayor wager his game leg against his, Ivan Ivanovich's, wall eye, which caused the mayor to take umbrage, and sent a ripple of quiet merriment through the crowd. No one had taken their places at table yet, although one o'clock had long since come and gone, a time when all Mirgorod, even on festive occasions, was wont to be at their dinner.

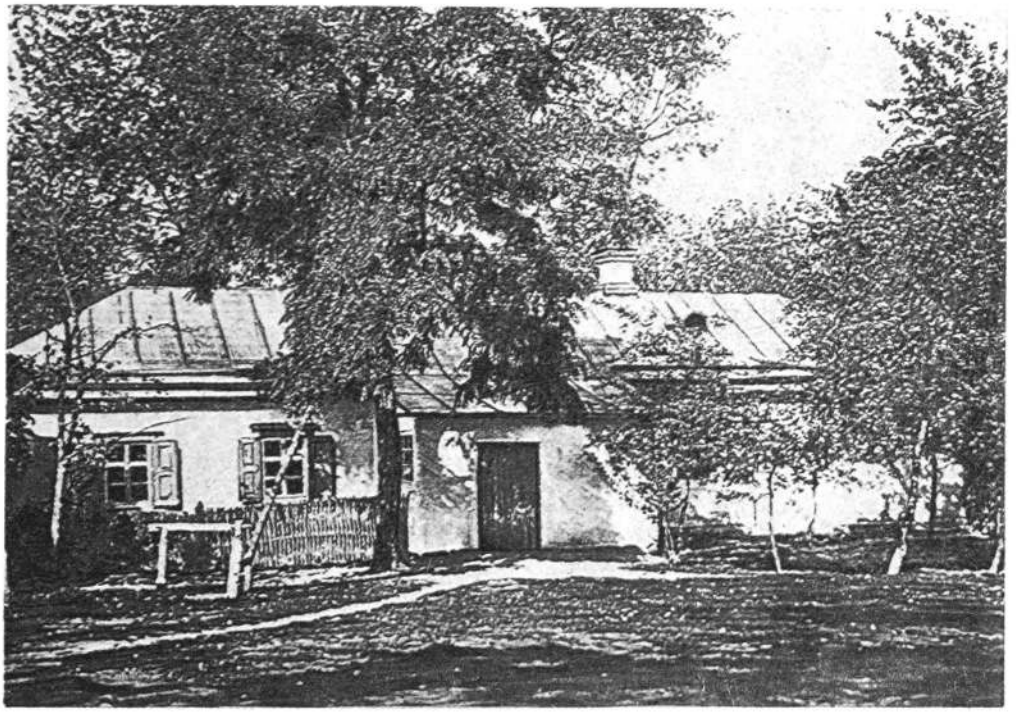
No sooner did Anton Prokofyevich appear in the door than he was at once surrounded by all those present. He answered all their questions with a single final statement: "He's not coming." Having said this he would have brought down on his head a rain of rebukes, abuse and even possibly fillips for the failure of his mission had not the door suddenly opened to reveal Ivan Nikiforovich.

Had it admitted Satan himself or a ghost, the event would not have so utterly astounded the entire company as did the unexpected arrival of Ivan Nikiforovich. But Anton Prokofyevich burst into laughter, holding his sides, delighted at the success of his little jest.

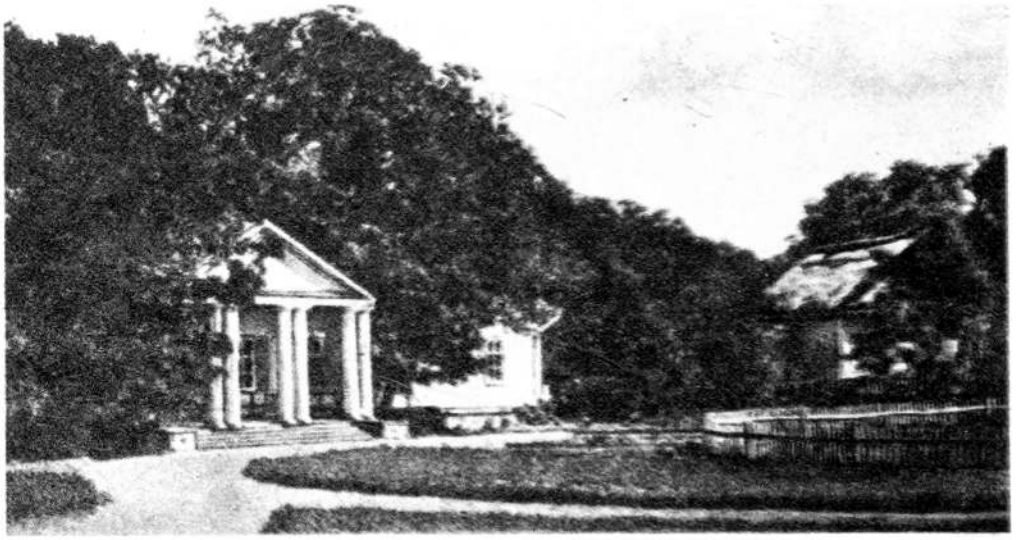
Jest or no jest, what was hardest of all for the guests to comprehend was how Ivan Nikiforovich had managed to attire himself as became his station in such a short time. Ivan Ivanovich was not present at this moment; he had gone outside on some business or other. Recovering from their shock, all the guests set about greeting Ivan Nikiforovich and expressed their delight at his increased solidity. Ivan Nikiforovich exchanged kisses with them all, saying "Much obliged, much obliged."

Meanwhile the smell of borsch wafted through the room pleasantly tickling the nostrils of the famished guests. As one man they thronged into the dining room. A file of ladies, garrulous and taciturn, slender and stout, surged ahead, and the table was soon resplendent with all the colours of the rainbow. I will not attempt to describe the victuals served up for the general delectation! I shall not say a word about the dumplings in sour cream, or the pies served up with the borsch, or the turkey with cream and raisins, or that dish that looked uncommonly like boots steeped in kvass, or the sauce, the

Poltava. General view of the town. 19th century photograph.

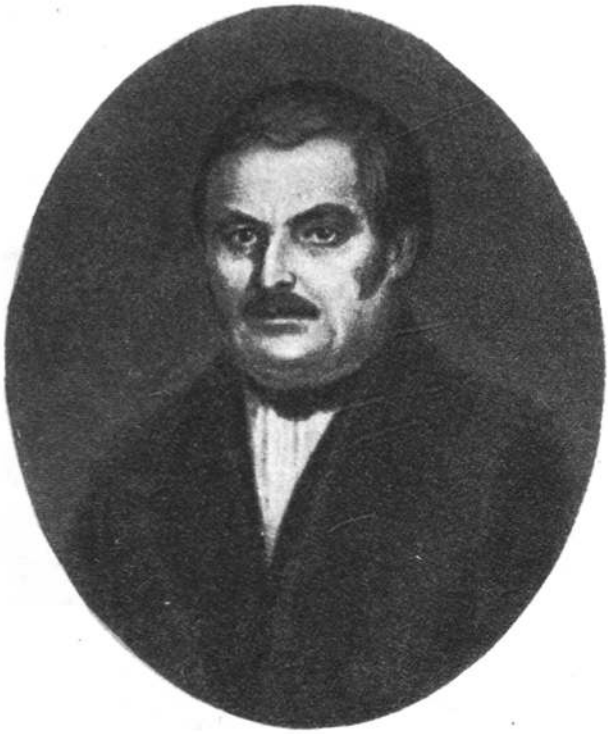


House in the village of Sorochintsy where Gogol was born on March 20, 1809. Photograph taken in the 1890s.



"Vasilyevka", home of Gogol's parents, where he spent his childhood. Photograph taken in the 1890s.
"To this day I often think back on my childhood..." Gogol wrote in a letter to his mother on October 2, 1833.

Pond in "Vasilyevka". Photograph taken in the 1890s.



Vassily Afanasyevich Gogol, the writer's father. Portrait by an unknown artist, early 19th century. Canvas, oils.

Maria Ivanovna Gogol, the writer's mother. Portrait by an unknown artist, early 19th century. Canvas, oils.

Nezhin Lyceum. Watercolour by S. Vizel. 1830s.
..."This Lyceum occupies a position of prominence amongst pre-university educational establishments..."
From the Statutes of the Nezhin Lyceum.

Книга всякой всячины

или

подручная Энциклопедия

Составл. Н. Г.

Нежинъ

1826

The "Book of Useful Information", Gogol's improvised encyclopedia, which he started compiling while a pupil at the Nezhin Lyceum, recording in it anything he found of interest.

N. V. Gogol as a pupil at the Lyceum. Print from a drawing by an unkhown artist, 1827.

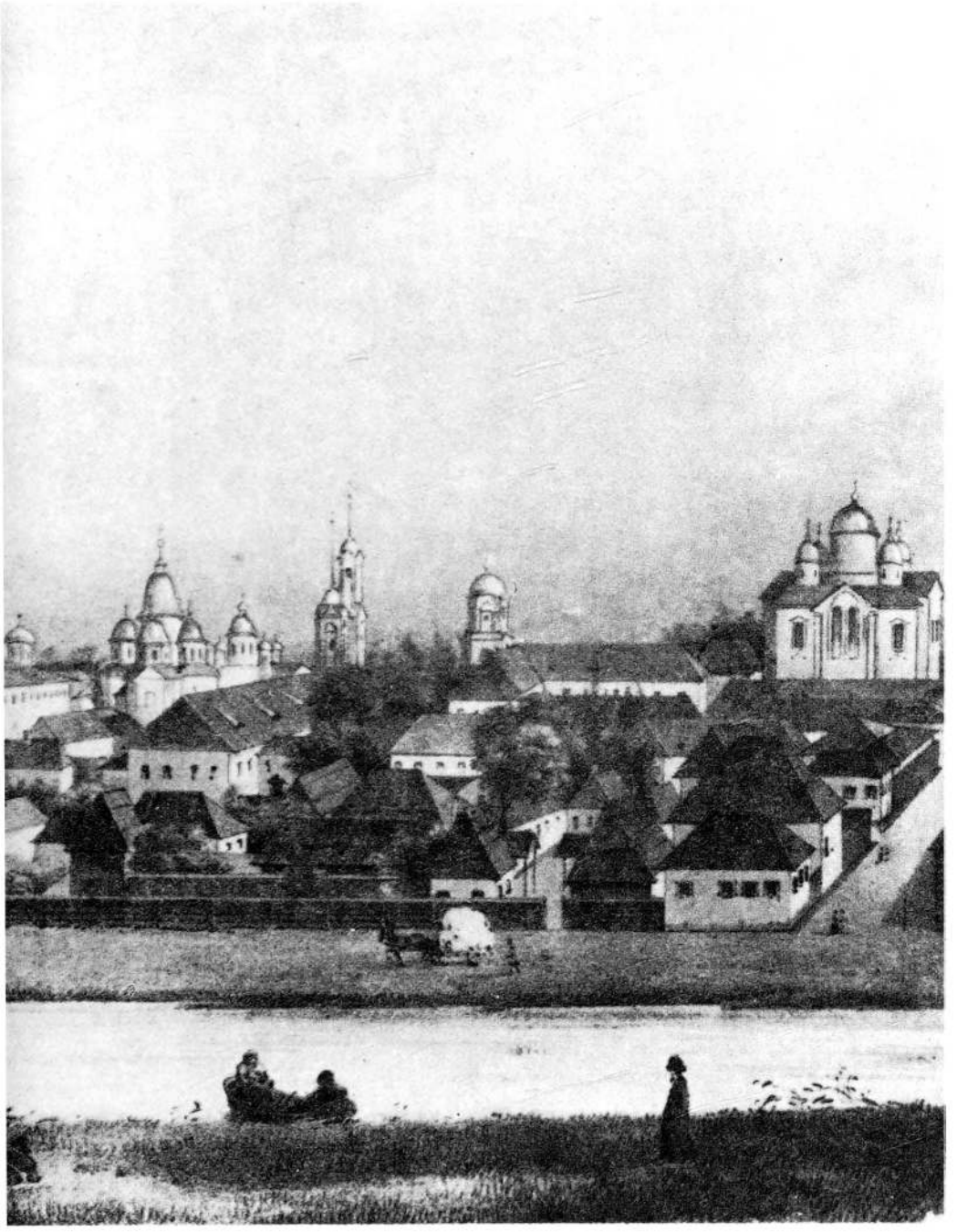
"...In those days, when I thought about my future... the idea of becoming a writer never entered my head, although I always felt that one day I would become famous..."

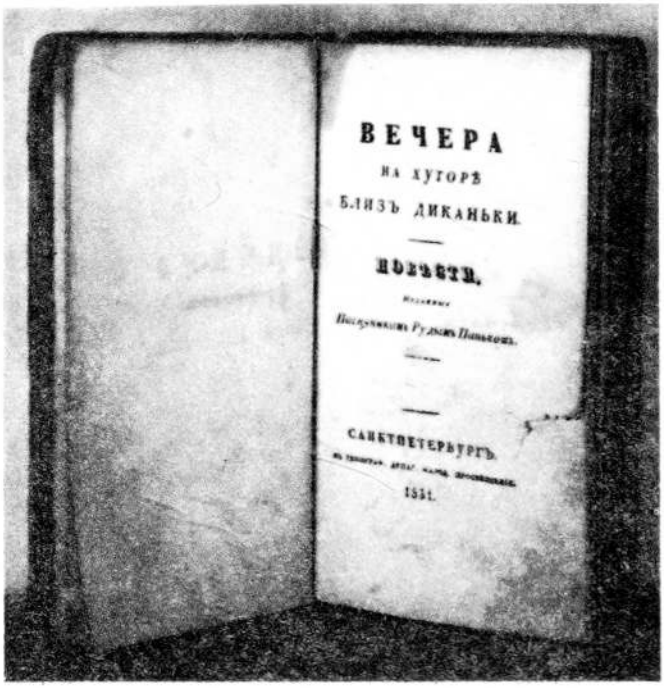
N. V. Gogol, "Confession by an Author".

Nezhin, general view of the town. Lithograph by P. Borel, mid-19th century.

"...Gogol wrote a satire about the people of Nezhin, under the title: 'Something about Nezhin, or Rules aren't written for Fools', and in it he depicted typical characters from the different social estates."

From G. I. Vysotsky's memoirs.

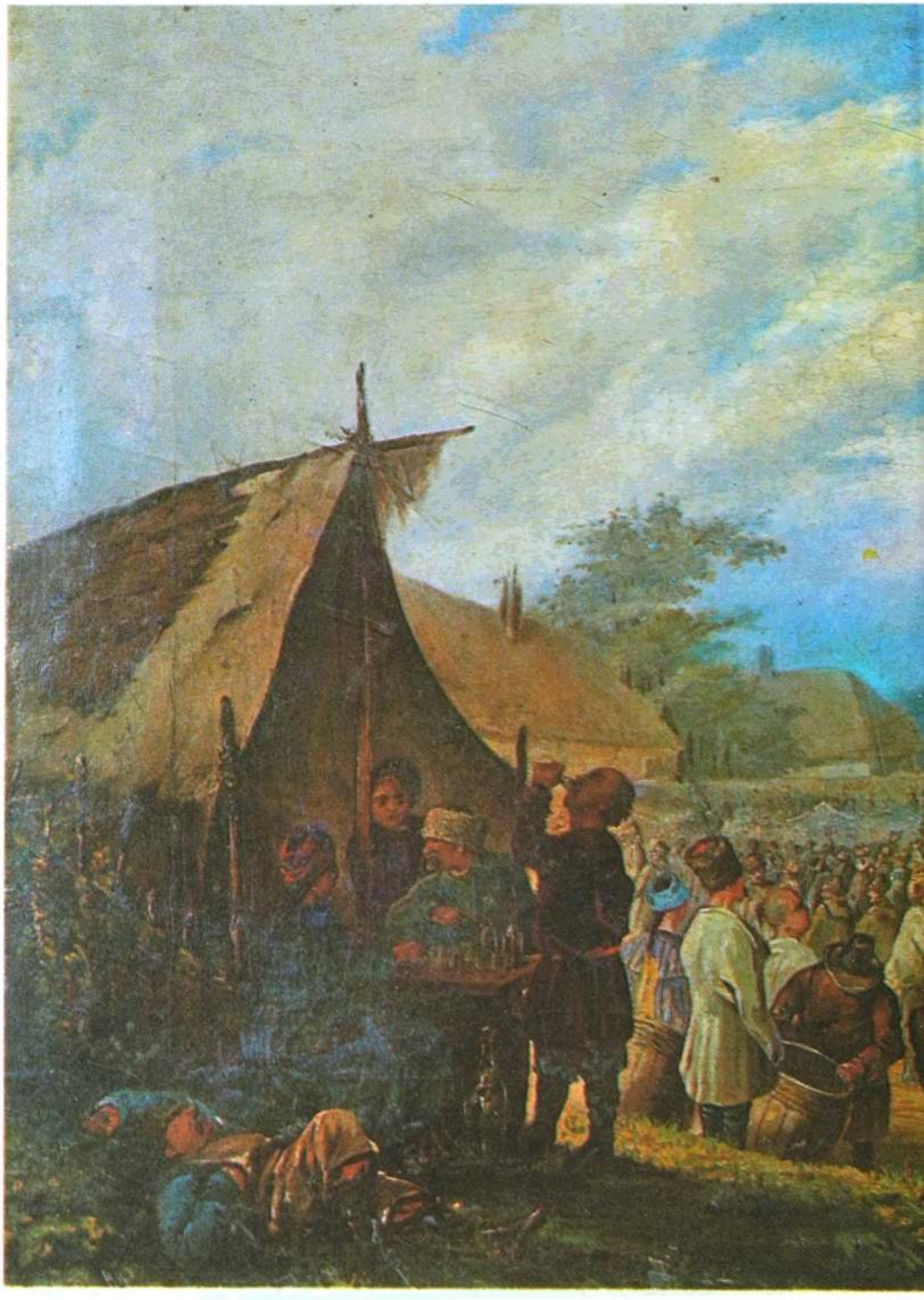




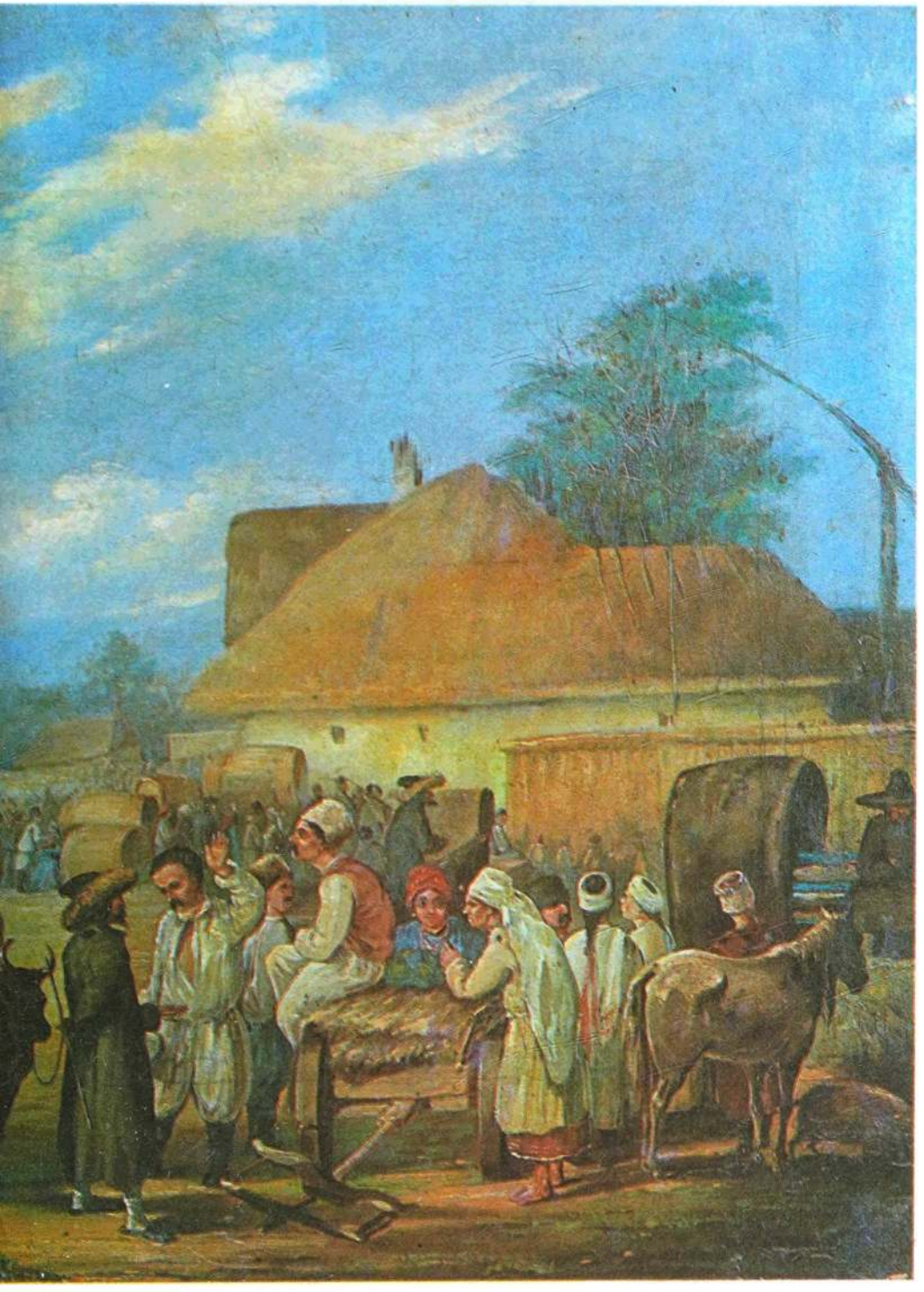
N. V. Gogol, *Village Evenings Near Dikanka.* First edition, St. Petersburg, 1831.
"I have just finished *Village Evenings Near Dikanka.* A remarkable book. Full of true merriment, genuine, spontaneous, easy and unaffected. In places sheer poetry!" A. S. Pushkin.

N. V. Gogol, "May Night". Illustration by P. Korovin.

N. V. Gogol, "Taras Bulba", Illustration by E Kibrik. Autolithograph, 1945.



"Country Fair in the Ukraine". Lithograph by V. Timme from a water-colour by Sterberg. 1836



МИРГОРОДЪ.

ПОВѢСТИ,

Сочиненія продолжающаго Вечера на хуторѣ близъ Диканьки

Н. ГОГОЛЯ.

Часть первая.

САНКТПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.
1835.

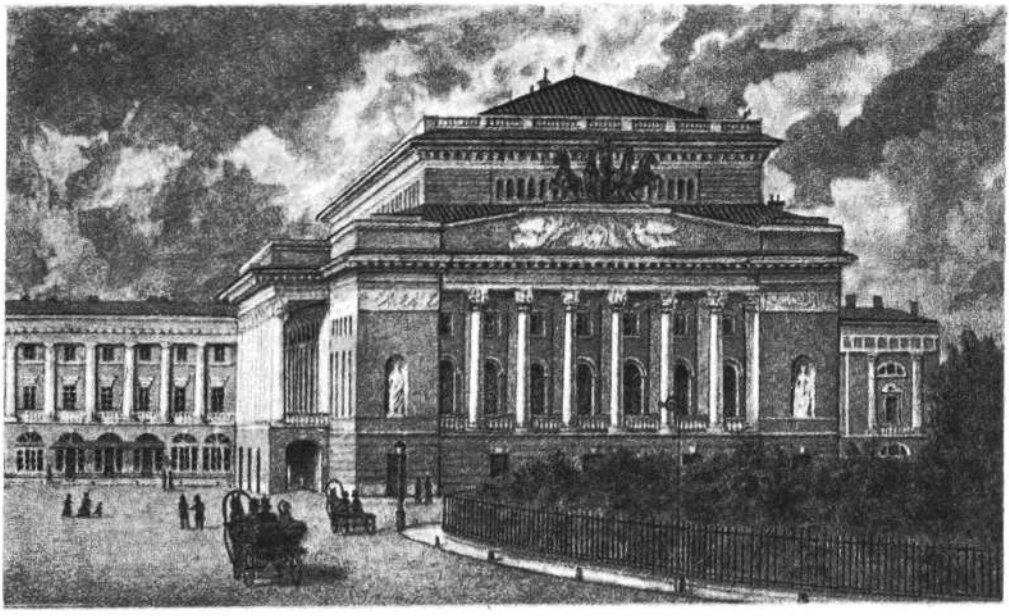
N. V. Gogol, *Mirgorod*. Title-page of the first edition. St. Petersburg, 1835.

"You will shortly receive his Mirgorod... What variety! What poetry! What accurate character portrayal! So much humour, and so much sublime tragedy! Yes, a new star has risen on the horizon of Russian letters..."

M. P. Pogodin, from a letter, March 1835.

N. V. Gogol, "Viy". Print from the drawing by M. Mikeshin, 1877.

St. Petersburg. Academy of Fine Arts. 19th century lithograph.
"...At five o'clock I make way to my class, in the Academy of Fine Arts, where I am studying painting, an activity I simply cannot give up."
N. V. Gogol to his mother, June 4, 1830.
Gogol studied art back at the Lyceum too, doing ink, pencil and crayon drawings.



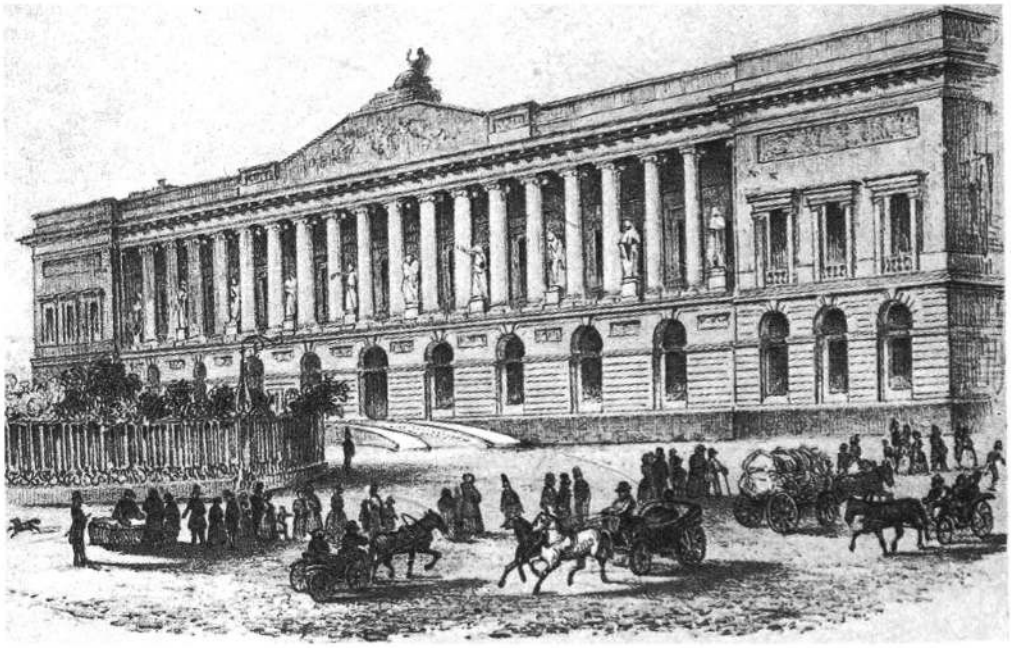
St. Petersburg, Alexandrinsky Theatre. Gogol attempted to get a job at the theatre as an actor. 19th century lithograph.

N. Ya. Prokopovich, man of letters and Gogol's friend from their days at the Nezhin Lyceum. Lithograph of the 1840s.

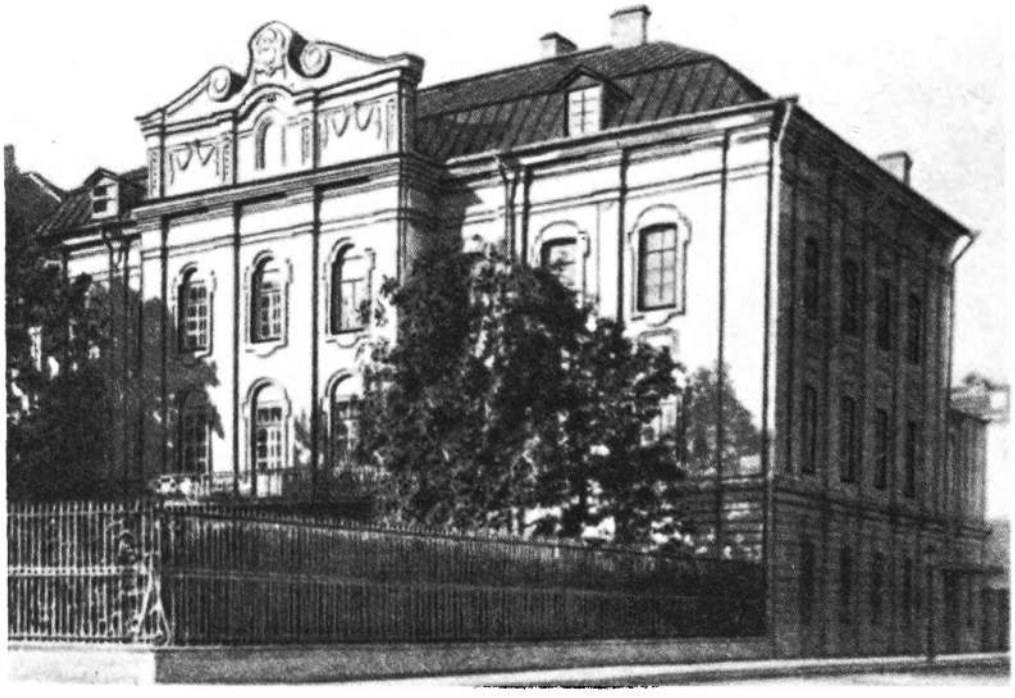
A. S. Danilevsky, Gogol's closest and life-long friend. His reminiscences of the author were recorded by Gogol's first biographer, V. I. Shenrok.

St. Petersburg. Department of Crown Property, where Gogol served in 1830-1831. Print, 1834.

N. V. Gogol, "The Greatcoat". Illustration by V. Kustodiev.



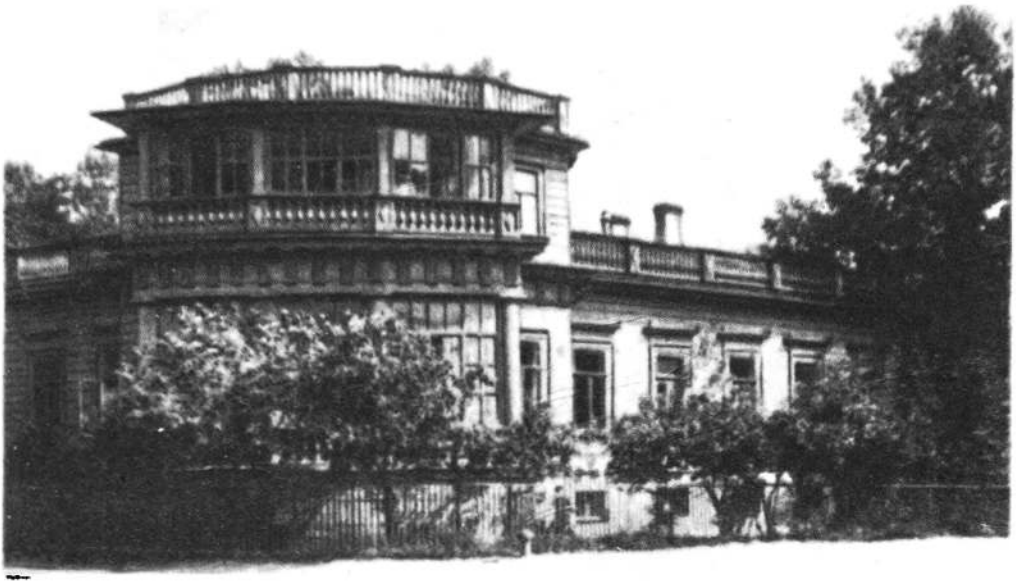
St. Petersburg. Public Library. 19th century lithograph.



St. Petersburg. University. Gogol taught at the department of world history from autumn 1834 until the end of 1835. Photograph.

A. S. Pushkin. Portrait by P. Sokolov. Watercolours.

The poet V. A. Zhukovsky. Portrait by P. Sokolov. Watercolours.



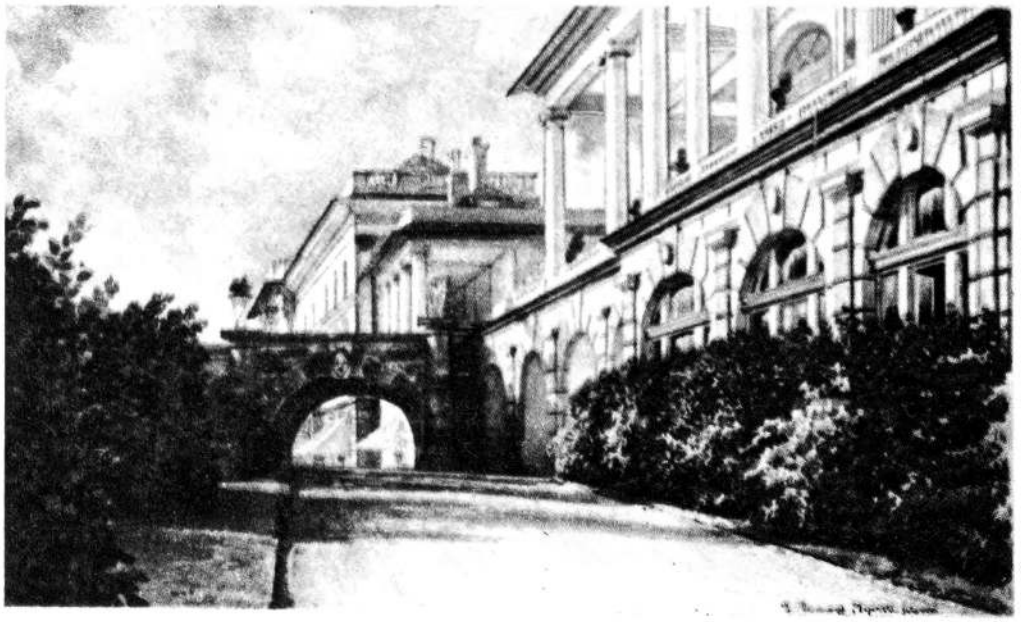
Kitayeva's villa in Tsarskoye Selo, where Pushkin spent the summer of 1831. Photograph.

"I spent the whole summer in Pavlovsk and Tsarskoye Selo... We met up almost every evening: Zhukovsky, Pushkin and me. If only you knew what wonders come from the pen of these men."

Gogol to A. S. Danilevsky, November, 2, 1831.

N. V. Gogol. Drawing by A. S. Pushkin, 1833.

A. S. Pushkin. Drawing by N. V. Gogol, 1830s.



The Cameron gallery in Tsarskoye Selo. Photograph.

swan song of the old-world cook, served flambé in wine brandy, which greatly diverted and at the same time alarmed the ladies. I refrain from writing about these dishes because I find it much more agreeable to eat them than to enlarge on them in idle conversation.

Ivan Ivanovich greatly enjoyed the fish in a horseradish sauce. He became totally absorbed in this beneficial and nourishing exercise. Filletting the fish of even its very tiniest bones and placing them to one side of his plate he inadvertently glanced across the table and—good heavens, what a shock! Opposite him sat Ivan Nikiforovich.

At exactly the same moment Ivan Nikiforovich looked up!.., No... It's beyond me!.. Give me another pen! Mine is too limp, too inert, the nib too fine for this tableau! Their amazed faces seemed to turn to stone. Each of them beheld the face of an old crony, whom instinct prompted them to approach, as a friend met unexpectedly, and to proffer their snuff pouch with the invitation: "Help yourself" or "Dare I ask you to be my guest?" but at the same time these same faces portended something terrible, like an ill omen. Sweat poured in rivulets from both Ivan Ivanovich's and Ivan Nikiforovich's brows.

The guests, all those present at the table, froze in their seats, unable to tear their eyes away from these two men, once such great friends. The ladies, who until that moment had been engaged in a rather interesting conversation about how to fatten capons, abruptly broke off their discussion. Total silence reigned! This was a scene worthy of the brush of a great artist!

Finally Ivan Ivanovich took out his handkerchief and commenced blowing his nose, while Ivan Nikiforovich looked around and rested his gaze on the open door. The mayor at once remarked this movement and ordered a servant to close the door properly. Then the two friends returned to their food and did not so much as glance at each other again.

The moment the dinner was over the two former cronies leapt from their seats and started looking for their hats, in order to slip away. At this point the mayor winked and Ivan Ivanovich—not the Ivan Ivanovich, but the other one, the one with the wall eye—went and stood behind Ivan Nikiforovich, while the mayor took up a position behind Ivan Ivanovich, and from these vantage points they started to nudge them forwards, with the idea of effecting a confrontation, deter-

mined not to release them until they had shaken hands. Ivan Ivanovich, the one with the wall eye, pushed Ivan Nikiforovich forwards, admittedly along rather a tangential route, but successfully piloting him to the spot where Ivan Ivanovich was standing; but the mayor steered a course too much to one side, being unable to subjugate his disobedient infantry, which on this occasion was deaf to all his commands and as if to spite him swung out on one flank quite in the wrong direction (which could perhaps be attributable to the terrific variety of beverages consumed at the table), with the result that Ivan Ivanovich collided with a lady in a red dress, who had been propelled by sheer curiosity into the very centre. This boded no good. However, the judge, anxious to set things to rights, took the mayor's place, and drawing all the snuff from his upper lip with a hefty sniff, thrust Ivan Ivanovich in the opposite direction. In Mirgorod this was the usual method of reconciliation. It is not unlike a game of ball. As soon as the judge had launched Ivan Ivanovich, Ivan Ivanovich with the wall eye mustered all his strength and heaved forward Ivan Nikiforovich, who by now was dripping with sweat. Despite the staunch resistance put up by the two friends the collision did in fact take place, because the propelling parties were being handsomely reinforced by the other guests.

At this they were surrounded on all sides and not released until they at last ventured to put forward their hands.

"Come now, Ivan Nikiforovich and Ivan Ivanovich! Fancy quarrelling over such a little thing! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves before others and before God?"

"I don't know," said Ivan Nikiforovich, panting with exhaustion (it was apparent that he was by no means averse to the idea of reconciliation), "I don't know what I did to Ivan Ivanovich, to make him chop down my goose coop and plan to bring about my ruin."

"I am not guilty of any malicious intention," protested Ivan Ivanovich, without looking at Ivan Nikiforovich. "I swear to God and to all of you, most worthy ladies and gentlemen, that I did nothing to cause his enmity. So why does he slander me and cause injury to my rank and title?"

"What injury, Ivan Ivanovich, did I cause you?" asked Ivan Nikiforovich.

Another minute of such explanation and their long-stand-

ing enmity would have been dissolved. Ivan Nikiforovich had already put his hand in pocket, preparatory to taking out his snuff-box and saying. "Help yourself."

"So was it not an injury then," answered Ivan Ivanovich, without raising his eyes, "when you, my good sir, insulted my rank and family with a word which it would be indecent to utter here?"

"Allow me to tell you as one friend to another, Ivan Ivanovich" (at which point Ivan Nikiforovich's finger alighted on one of Ivan Ivanovich's buttons, an indication of his thoroughly amicable disposition), "you took offense at some complete nonsense, at my calling you a *goose*..."

Ivan Nikiforovich suddenly realised how reckless he had been to utter this word; but it was too late, the damage had been done.

Everything went up in smoke!

If the utterance of this word in the absense of any witnesses had been sufficient to throw Ivan Ivanovich into a rage such as we may hope never to see, just imagine, dear reader, its effect now, when this lethal word had been pronounced at a gathering attended by a multitude of ladies, in whose company Ivan Ivanovich always endeavoured to comport himself with the utmost decorum. Had Ivan Nikiforovich acted in any other fashion, had he said a bird, rather than a goose, for example, the day might still have been saved.

But all was lost!

Ivan Ivanovich darted a look at Ivan Nikiforovich—and what a look! If this look were invested with the power to executive its intention, Ivan Nikiforovich would have crumbled to dust on the spot. The guests understood the significance of this look and hastened to separate the two gentlemen. And this worthy man, the very soul of meekness, who could not pass by a single begger-woman without stopping to question her, stormed out of the room in a paroxysm of rage. Such are the fierce tempests whipped up by aroused passions!

For a whole month nothing was heard of Ivan Ivanovich. He locked himself up in his house. The sacred trunk was opened, and from it were taken—believe it or not—silver rubles! his grand-father's old silver rubles. These coins passed into the hands of the inkwell pettifoggers. The case was taken up by the regional assize court. And not until Ivan Ivanovich

received the joyous tidings that the case was to be heard on the morrow, did he look out at the world and venture forth from his house. Alas! Every day for the past ten years the assize court has unfailingly informed him that the case would be heard the next day!

•

About five years ago I travelled through the town of Mirgorod. The weather was bad for travelling. It was autumn, the season of gloom, mud and mists. An unnatural verdure—the product of interminable, dreary rains—covered the cornfields and pastures like a moist green veil, which looked as out of place as pranks from an old man, or roses on an old woman. In those years the weather governed my own mood: I was dreary when the weather was grey. Nevertheless, as I approached Mirgorod I felt my heart-beat quicken. Lord, what memories the place held for me! I had last seen Mirgorod twelve years before. The town had numbered amongst its inhabitants two unique men, bound by a friendship that was most touching to observe. So many of its famous citizens had died since then! Judge Demyan Demyanovich was by now deceased; Ivan Ivanovich, the one with the wall eye had also gone the way of all flesh. I drove into the main street; on all sides stood poles bearing tufts of hay: the handiwork of a new town planner! A few huts had been demolished. The remains of their fences and palisades peered sadly above the rubble.

It was a Sunday; I bade the coachman stop my carriage before the church and crept in so quietly that my entry passed unobserved. Mind you, there was practically no one to notice it. The church was empty. Apparently even the most pious citizens had been loath to brave the mud. Candle-light on this gloomy, or rather, sickly, day was strangely unpleasant; the dark side-chapels were melancholy; the elongated windows with their round panes streamed with tears of rain. I went into one of the side-chapels and enquired of a distinguished old man with grey hair:

"I wonder if you could tell me, is Ivan Nikiforovich still alive?"

At this moment the icon lamp flared up and its light fell directly on the old man's face. Imagine my surprise when, taking a closer look, I recognized familiar features! It was none

other than Ivan Nikiforovich! But how he had changed!

"Are you well, Ivan Nikiforovich? But how you've aged!"

"Yes, I'm an old man now. I've come from Poltava today," replied Ivan Nikiforovich.

"What on earth! You went to Poltava in this foul weather?"

"There was no option: a lawsuit..."

On hearing this I could not suppress a sigh.

Ivan Nikiforovich noticed this and said:

"Don't worry, I have it on good authority that the case will be decided in the course of next week, and in my favour."

I shrugged my shoulders and went off to make enquiries about Ivan Ivanovich.

"Ivan Ivanovich is here!" I was told. "He's in the choir."

Then I observed a thin form. Could that be Ivan Ivanovich? His face was covered with wrinkles, his hair completely white; but the coat was the very same. After preliminary greetings Ivan Ivanovich turned to me with a cheerful smile, so becoming to his funnel-shaped face, and said:

"Shall I tell you some good news?"

"What news?" I asked.

"Tomorrow my case will most definitely be decided. The assize court has given me its assurances."

I sighed still more deeply and hastened to take my leave, because I was travelling on very important business, and stepped into my carriage. The skinny nags, which in Mirgorod pass for post-horses, moved off, with an unpleasant squelching noise as their hooves sank into the deep mud. The rain poured down on the Jew sitting on the coach-box with a piece of bast matting over his head. The dampness penetrated my bones. We trundled slowly past the melancholy town gates with their sentry, box, in which the invalid soldier was cleaning his grey buckles and brasses. We were back in those same fields, in places black with ploughed earth, in others lush and green, with the same wet jackdaws and crows, the monotonous rain, the unrelieved greyness of the tearful sky.—What a dreary world we live in, gentlemen!

1833

From ST. PETERSBURG STORIES

NEVSKY PROSPEKT

Nothing could be finer than Nevsky Prospekt, at least not in St. Petersburg; it is the be-all and end-all. It positively gleams and sparkles—it is the jewel of our capital. I know that not one of the city's pallid civil servants would exchange Nevsky Prospekt for all the riches of the world. By this I mean not only the young fellow of twenty-five, sporting splendid moustaches and a remarkably well-cut frock coat, but also the old gentleman with white hairs jutting from his chin, and a pate as smooth as a silver dish—he too is in raptures about Nevsky Prospekt. And as for the ladies!—The ladies are even more enamoured of Nevsky Prospekt. Mind you, who wouldn't be enamoured of it? No sooner do you step out onto Nevsky Prospekt, that you are swept up in its endless promenade. You may have had some pressing business to attend to, but the moment you step onto Nevsky you will forget all your commitments. This is the only place where you will find people going without any special reason, were they are driven neither by mundane need nor by the mercantile interest which pervades all St. Petersburg. The person you meet on Nevsky Prospekt is likely to be less of an egoist than his counterpart on Morskaya, Gorokhovaya, Liteinaya, Meshchanskaya and other streets, where you can read avarice, cupidity and opportunism on the faces of the passers-by and those flying along in carriages and droshkys. Nevsky Prospekt is St. Petersburg's main artery. Here the resident of the Petersburgskaya or Vyborgskaya districts, who has not visited his friend in Pesky or by the Moskovsky Gate for some time, may be sure of meeting him. No directory or inquiry bureau will furnish such accurate information as Nevsky Prospekt. Nevsky

Prospekt is omnipotent! It provides the one entertainment in a city starved of relaxation. Where else will you see such cleanly-swept pavements, bearing the imprint of so many feet? The muddy, clumsy boot of the retired soldier whose impact seems to splinter the very granite, and the tiny slipper, as light as a puff of smoke, of the young mademoiselle, who turns her pretty head to the sparkling shop windows as a sunflower to the sun, and the clashing sabre of the ambitious ensign, which leaves a distinct scratch on its surface—once on Nevsky they are able to give vent to their particular strength, be it that of brute force or that of subtle weakness. It is like a dizzying magic-lantern show, played out every single day and going through countless variations. Let us begin with the very earliest hours of morning, when all St. Petersburg smells of freshly-baked bread and teems with old women in tattered dresses and coats, scuttling to the churches and accosting compassionate passers-by. At that hour Nevsky Prospekt lies empty awhile: the stout shop-keepers and salesmen are still slumbering in their holland nightshirts, or soaping their worthy cheeks and sipping coffee; the beggars are gathering at the doors of the pastry-shops, where a sleepy Ganymede, who the previous day had darted about like a fly bearing cups of chocolate, emerges tieless and wielding a broom to sweep out for them the stale pies and left-overs. Working people thread their way along the pavements: amongst them you sometimes see Russian peasants hurrying across the street on their way to work, clad in boots so caked with lime that not even the Yekaterininsky canal, so famed for its clean water, could wash them clean. At this hour it is unseemly for ladies to walk out, because the Russian populace is wont to employ the sort of strong language that they would be unlikely to hear even in the theatre. Occasionally a sleepy civil servant will trudge past with his briefcase gripped under his arm, if the route to his department lies across Nevsky Prospekt. We can state without fear of contradiction that at this time, before 12 o'clock, Nevsky Prospekt is not anyone's destination, it is only the means to an end: it gradually fills with people going about their business and so burdened with their own worries and cares, that they do not pay any heed to it whatever. The Russian peasant mutters about the ten kopecks, or seven brass farthings he's owed, old men and women wave their arms, or talk to themselves, some-

times with expressive gestures, but no one pays attention or laughs at them, except for the urchins in their dungaree smocks hurtling down Nevsky Prospekt clutching empty vodka bottles or freshly-polished boots. At this time of day you can wear what you like, even a peaked cap instead of a hat, or let your collar tips jut too far above your tie, and no one would so much as bat an eyelid.

At 12 o'clock tutors of all nationalities invade Nevsky Prospekt with their charges buttoned into lawn collars. English Joneses and French Coques walk hand-in-hand with the young wards entrusted to their parental care and explain to them in a stolidly decorous way that signs are erected above shops as a means of indicating what may be found inside them. Governesses, pale English misses and rosy-cheeked Slav maidens, walk in stately fashion behind their slim, fidgety girls, commanding them to hold their heads high and backs straight; in other words, at this time Nevsky Prospekt is a pedagogical thoroughfare. But as two o'clock draws near the number of tutors, teachers and children decreases as these are gradually replaced by their doting parents, fathers walking arm-in-arm with their brightly-plumaged and delicate ladies. Gradually they are joined by all those who have completed their important domestic business: conferred with their doctor about the weather or the small pimple that has emerged on their nose, enquired after the health of their horses or children, both, incidentally, evincing remarkable talents, perused the theatre poster or an important article about arrivals and departures in the newspaper and, finally, drunk a cup of coffee or tea; their numbers are then swelled by those whom fate has blessed with the coveted title of civil servants on special commission. These are joined by those who serve in the Foreign Collegium and are distinguished by the nobility of their occupations and habits. Goodness, what splendid offices and services there are! How they ennoble and delight the soul! But alas, I myself do not serve and so am deprived of the pleasure of being addressed in refined terms by heads of departments. All that meets the eye on Nevsky Prospekt is filled with decorum: all about you you see men in long frock coats with their hands in their pockets, ladies in pink, white and pale blue coats and hats. Here you will encounter unique side-whiskers, admitted with extraordinary and remarkable skill to a point below the

tie, whiskers of velvet and of satin, whiskers as black as sable or coal, but, alas, belonging only to the Foreign Collegium. The servants of the other departments have been denied black side-whiskers by providence and are forced to their great displeasure to wear red ones. Here you can see fantastic moustaches, which no pen nor brush can describe; moustaches to whose cultivation the greater part of a human life has been devoted—the object of watchful days and wakeful nights, moustaches which have been doused with the most delicious perfumes and scents and anointed with the most expensive and rare pomades, moustaches which are encased at night in fine vellum, moustaches to which their proprietors are most tenderly attached and which are the envy of passers-by. Anyone chancing on Nevsky Prospekt will be dazzled by the infinite variety of hats, dresses, and scarves, light and colourful, which will sometimes retain the affections of their wearers for two whole days on end. It is as though an entire sea of butterflies had suddenly taken off into the air to hover in a shimmering cloud above the black beetles of the male sex. Here you will encounter waists the like of which you will not have seen even in your dreams: slender, narrow waists no thicker than the neck of a bottle, on beholding which you respectfully step aside lest inadvertently you should jostle them with an impolite elbow; your heart is seized with timidity and fear lest a careless breath of yours might snap this most exquisite work of nature and art. And as for the sleeves worn by the ladies on Nevsky Prospekt! Sheer delight! They bear a certain similarity to twin balloons, ready at any moment to hoist their wearer aloft into the air, were she not held down by her cavalier, for lifting ladies into the air is as simple and agreeable a task as raising a goblet of champagne to the lips. Nowhere do people greet one another with bow of such noble unconstraint as they do on Nevsky Prospekt. Here you can see a unique smile, a smile that is beyond art, that could make you melt with pleasure, or a smile that makes you feel quite lowly so that you involuntarily bend your head, or another that makes you feel taller than the Admiralty Spire, so you raise your head up high. Here you will hear people discussing a concert or the weather in an extraordinarily genteel fashion and with remarkable dignity. Here you will encounter a thousand inscrutable characters and phenomena. Lord, what strange characters you see on Nevsky

Prospekt! Many of the people you meet will at once lower their eyes to your boots, and should you walk on past them they will look back to observe the tails of your coat. To this day I am unable to comprehend why they should do this. At first I thought they must be shoemakers, but not a bit of it: for the most part they serve in various departments, many of them being able to draft with superb skill a memorandum from one office to another; or they are people engaged in promenading and reading newspapers in pastry shops—in other words, they are predominantly highly respectable people. It is during this hour from 2 to 3 p.m., the zenith of Nevsky's day, that we can see the grand display of all the best products of man's genius. One will exhibit a dandyish frock coat with a collar of the best beaver, another a superb Grecian nose, a third sports excellent whiskers, a fourth a pair of the prettiest eyes and a remarkable hat, a fifth a signet ring worn foppishly on the little finger, a sixth a dainty little foot cased in the most charming slipper, a seventh a cravat which provokes universal wonderment, an eighth moustaches which astonish the beholder. But on the stroke of three the exhibition ends and the crowd begins to thin... At three o'clock there is another change. Spring suddenly breaks on Nevsky Prospekt: it is astir with civil servants in green uniforms. Titular, aulic and other councillors scurry along, propelled by their pangs of hunger. Young collegiate registrars, gubernia and collegiate secretaries, anxious to make good use of their free time, stroll down Nevsky Prospekt with dignified bearing, showing the world that they have not been sitting for 6 hours in office. But the old collegiate secretaries, titular and aulic councillors walk swiftly with their heads bowed, for they cannot permit themselves to waste time studying the passers-by; they have not entirely shed their daily cares and carry around in their heads an entire jumbled archive of files begun and unfinished; for a long time when they look at the shop signs they seem to see boxes full of documents or the fleshy face of the director of the office.*

* The Imperial Russian civil service employed a hierarchy of 14 ranks devised by Peter the Great. The ranks mentioned here occupy the following position in the Table of Ranks in descending order of seniority: 7. aulic councillor; 9. titular councillor; 10. collegiate secretary; 12. gubernia secretary; 14. collegiate registrar.—*Ed.*

From four o'clock onwards Nevsky Prospekt is empty and you are unlikely to encounter on it a single civil servant. You may see a seamstress run across bearing a box, or the wretched victim of some philanthropic court bailiff, with nothing left in the world but his frieze greatcoat, or an eccentric tourist, who makes no distinction between the hours of day, or a gaunt English miss carrying a reticule and a little book, or a Russian porter with a thin beard and wearing a twilled cotton frock coat with its waist high up his back, living from hand to mouth, and all astir in his back, hands, legs and head, as he gingerly picks his way along the pavement, or the occasional menial artisan; these are the only people you will encounter on Nevsky Prospekt.

But the moment dusk settles on the houses and streets and the night watchman, a length of bast matting over his shoulders, clambers up a ladder to light the street lanterns while in the low shop windows tableaux reveal themselves which dare not show themselves by daylight, once again Nevsky Prospekt comes alive with movement. Now comes that mysterious time when the street lamps bathe everything in an alluring, magical light. You will encounter large numbers of young people, for the most part bachelors, in warm frock coats and greatcoats. At this time the air is vibrant with a sense of purpose, or something rather like it though not so easy to pin down. Everyone walks faster and with rather jerky steps. Long shadows flit along the walls and pavement, their heads almost reaching the Politseisky bridge. The young collegiate registrars, and gubernia and collegiate secretaries stroll up and down endlessly, but the old collegiate registrars and titular and aulic counsellors for the most part remain at home, either because they are married people, or because their live-in German maids are excellent cooks. Here you will meet those same respectable old men who were promenading along Nevsky Prospekt with such staidness and remarkable dignity at two o'clock. You will see them running, just like young collegiate registrars, to peek under the bonnet of a lady espied from afar, a lady whose ripe lips and rouged cheeks are so much to the liking of the promenaders, especially the shop-assistants, artisans and merchants, who are invariably clad in German frock coats and stroll along arm-in-arm in large groups.

"Stop!" called out lieutenant Pirogov, tugging at his young

companion, attired in tail-coat and cloak. "Did you see her?"

"I did, what a beauty, Perugini's Biance to a T".

"Which one are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about that one, the one with the dark hair. And those eyes! My God, what eyes! the entire bearing and the lines, and the cast of the face—unbelievable!"

"Actually, I'm talking about the blonde who was walking behind her, on that direction. Why don't you go after the dark one if she so took your fancy?"

"What an idea!" exclaimed the young man in the tails, flushing. "As if she's one of those women who flount themselves on Nevsky Prospekt at night; she must be an extremely distinguished lady," he continued with a sigh, "her cloak alone must have cost eighty rubles!"

"Dunderhead!" shouted Pirogov, pushing him in the direction taken by her billowing cloak: "Get a move on, you duffer, or you'll lose her! and I'll go for the blonde."

The two friends parted.

"We know your kind," mused Pirogov with a smug and self-assured smile, convinced that there was no beauty who could withstand him.

The young man in the tail-coat set off with a timid and hesitant step in the direction of the colourful cape, which billowed in the distance, shining brightly as it approached the street-lights, and the next instant moving away to be swallowed up in the gloom. His heart pounded as he involuntarily quickened his step. He dared not even contemplate the possibility of attracting the attention of this elusive beauty, let alone admit such lewd thoughts as those lieutenant Pirogov had been suggesting; he only wanted to see the house, to find the abode of this divine creature, who, it seemed, had descended directly from heaven onto Nevsky Prospekt and was now floating away to some unknown destination. He himself dashed along so fast that he repeatedly knocked from the pavement stolid grey-whiskered gentlemen. This young man belonged to that class which constitutes one of the strange phenomena of our life and which is as much a part of the St. Petersburg citizenry as a person seen in a dream is a part of the real world. This unique class is most remarkable in a city where everyone is a civil servant, a shopkeeper or a German craftsman. Our young man was an artist. A strange phenomenon, do you not agree? A

St. Petersburg artist! An artist in the land of snow, an artist in the land of the Finns, where everything is wet, smooth, flat, pale, grey and misty. These artists bear little resemblance to their Italian counterparts, as proud and fiery as Italy and its skies; these, on the contrary, are for the most part kind and meek people, shy and unworldly, people who are quietly devoted to painting, and fond of drinking tea with their two friends in a small room, modestly discussing the subject closest to their hearts and scorning all luxury. The St. Petersburg artist is forever bringing to his room some poor old woman and making her sit for him for six full hours, in order to translate her blank and pitiable features onto canvas. He draws the perspective of his room, in which you will find all sorts of artistic rubbish: plaster-of-Paris arms and legs, which time and the accretions of dust have imbued with the hue of coffee, broken easels, an upended palette, a friend playing the guitar, paint-stained walls and an open window, through which glint the pale Neva and the wretched fishermen in their red shirts. In all their paintings you see the same lacklustre colours—the ineradicable stamp of the North. Nevertheless they toil at their paints with true pleasure. They are frequently endowed with genuine talent, and were the fresh wind of Italy to blow on them this talent would probably blossom just as freely, generously and brightly as a potted plant which has at last been brought outdoors into the fresh air. On the whole they are very timid: a star and an imposing epaulette will reduce them to such a state of trepidation that they involuntarily lower the price of their pictures. They occasionally like to swank but these attempts at flamboyance always stand out like a sore thumb. At times they can be seen wearing a splendid tail-coat half-concealed by a scruffy old cloak, an expensive velvet waistcoat under a paint-stained frock coat. The same is true of their art: you might see in one of their unfinished landscapes a nymph painted upside-down, which, for lack of anywhere else to paint her has been put on top of some earlier picture, at the time painted with great pleasure. He will never look you straight in the eye, and if he does catch your eye his glance will be vague and distracted; he does not pierce you with the hawk-like eye of a supervisor or the falcon's gaze of a cavalry officer. This is because at one and the same time he will be seeing your features, and those of some plaster-of-Paris

Hercules standing in his room; or he will be contemplating some yet-to-be-painted picture. This will cause him to answer your questions incoherently, sometimes irrelevantly, and the objects jumbled up in his head will further increase his timidity. Such a type was our young man, the artist Piskarev, shy and retiring, but nourishing in his heart sparks of feeling, ready to burst into flame at the first opportunity. With a secret tremor he quickened his pace and even marvelled at his own daring. Suddenly the unknown creature to whom his eyes, thoughts and feelings were so firmly fastened turned her head and glanced at him. Good God, what divine features! Her exquisite brow, dazzling in its whiteness, was framed by a flounce of hair as beautiful as agate. The lustrous locks curled as they fell, and some of them escaped from under her bonnet to brush against her cheek, tinged a fresh delicate colour by the evening chill. The curve of her lips was suggestive of a swarm of the most enchanting reveries. It was as though everything that survives of our childhood memories, the sweet matter of our daydreams by the light of an icon-lamp, was blended together and reflected in those lovely lips. She glanced at Piskarev, and on catching her eye his heart fluttered; it was a stern look and her face took on an expression of displeasure that anyone should have the impudence thus to pursue her, but on this lovely face even anger was enchanting. Covered with shame and confusion he halted and lowered his gaze; but how could he bear to lose his goddess and not discover in what sanctum she deigned to make her abode? Such were the thoughts that flocked to our young dreamer's head, and he determined to continue his pursuit. But to ensure that this would be unnoticed he increased the distance between them, casually looking about him and surveying the shop-signs, not, however, missing a single step taken by the lovely stranger. The passers-by started to thin out, the street grew quieter; his unknown beauty looked back, and he seemed to see a shadow of a smile flit across her lips. He shivered all over, unable to believe his eyes. No, it was the deceptive light of the streetlamp that had given her face the semblance of a smile—no, it was his own fancy mocking him. But he suddenly caught his breath, and started to tremble all over, as a burning sensation seized him and a mist settled over his eyes. The pavement slipped away beneath him, and the carriages with their galloping horses seemed

motionless beside him, the bridge stretched and arched its back, buildings turned upside-down, a sentry-box rolled towards him, while the policeman's halberd, the gold lettering and painted scissors of a shop-sign seemed to be sparkling on one of his eyelashes. All this was caused by a single glance, a single turn of a pretty head. Unseeing, unhearing and insensible to everything, he hurtled along in the tracks of those dainty feet, vainly endeavouring to restrain the pace of his footsteps, which were keeping time with the beating of his heart. At moments he would be seized by doubt: was he right to read encouragement in her eyes?—and he would pause for a moment; but the pounding of his heart, the irresistible force and excitement of his feelings drove him onwards. He did not even notice the four-storey building which suddenly loomed before him, or the four rows of brightly lit windows which stared at him, or the metal railing at the porch which barred his way. He saw the beautiful stranger fly up some stairs, look round, put a finger to her lips and give him a sign to follow her. His knees trembled; his heart and mind were afire; his breast was seared by an unbearably sharp pang of joy. No, this was no trick of his imagination! My God, such happiness contained in a single instant! What bliss in a mere two minutes!

But was he not perhaps dreaming all this? Could it be true that this creature, for one heavenly glance from whom he was prepared to sacrifice his life, and to approach whose abode he felt to be an unutterable joy, that this same creature was now being so well-disposed and attentive towards him? He flew up the stairs. No earthly thought passed through his head; he was not fired by the flame of earthly passion, no, at this moment he was pure and chaste, like a virgin youth who still harbours a pure spiritual need for love. And where a more worldly man might have indulged certain daring thoughts, his mind on the contrary only ascended to new heights of chasteness. The trust placed in him by this frail and beautiful creature committed him to a strict obligation of chivalry, a vow slavishly to carry out her every behest. He only wished that these behests might be as demanding and taxing as possible, so that he could the greater exert himself for their fulfilment. He had no doubt that something mysterious and significant had occurred to cause the stranger to put her trust in him; that formidable services

would be required of him, and he already felt in himself the strength and determination to do anything.

The staircase spiralled upwards, and with it soared the swift flight of his fancy. The warning "Mind your step!" rang in his ears like the notes of a harp, and the sound of her voice caused him to tremble anew in every nerve. High up on the dark fourth floor the stranger knocked on a door which opened and they entered together. A woman of a not unpleasing appearance met them bearing a candle, but she gave Piskarev such a strange and brazen look that he involuntarily lowered his eyes. They entered the room. His eyes encountered three female forms in different corners of the room. One was laying out cards; another, sitting at a piano, picked out with two fingers a wretched imitation of an old polonaise; a third sat before a mirror combing out her long hair, and had not the least intention of abandoning her toilet at the entrance of a strange person. Everywhere he saw the sort of unpleasant disorder you might find in the untidy room of a bachelor. The furniture, of fairly good quality, was covered in dust; a spider had spread its web over the moulded cornice; through the open door of an adjacent room could be seen a gleaming boot and spur and the red piping of a uniform; a loud male voice and female laughter rang out without the slightest inhibition.

Good God, where was he? At first he would not believe his eyes and he set about carefully studying the objects with which the room was filled: the bare walls and curtainless windows, however, displayed a lack of any housewifely care; the haggard faces of these wretched creatures, one of whom had seated herself right in front of his nose and was quite calmly examining him as if he were a stain on someone's dress, all this convinced him that he had strayed into that repulsive den of the wretched vice created by the tawdry sophistication and terrible congestion of the capital. For this was one of those establishments where man has sacrilegiously suppressed and reviled everything pure and sacred, everything which adorns life, where woman, the beauty of this world, the pearl of creation, has been degraded into something strange and equivocal, where she has lost all purity of spirit and all femininity, in the most repellent way appropriating the manners and audacity of man, and where she has ceased to be that exquisite being, so different from her male counterparts. Piskarev measured her

from head to toe with astonished eyes, as if to make absolutely sure that this was the same person that had so bewitched him and borne him away on Nevsky Prospekt. But standing there before him she was just as fair; her hair was just as lovely; and her eyes still appeared heavently. She was a fresh flower, only 17 years old, and can only recently have lapsed into this terrible depravity; her cheeks had not yet been touched by it and still retained their soft tinge and rosy bloom: she was lovely.

He froze before her and was once again on the point of forgetting himself. But the girl grew tired of this long silence and gave a knowing smile, looking him straight in the eye. It was a smile full of shameless invitation, as unsuited to her face as an expression of piety to the mug of a bribe-taker or an accounts ledger to the hand of a poet. He shuddered. She opened her pretty mouth and started to say something, but it was all so stupid, so vulgar... It was as though a person should lose his mind with his virtue. He desired to hear no more. Our hero was a quite ridiculous person, as naive as a child. Instead of availing himself of such a favourable opportunity, instead of being delighted at such luck, which would undoubtedly have delighted anyone else in his place, he rushed headlong out of the room like a startled deer and ran into the street.

With lowered head and arms slumped at his sides he sat in his room feeling like a beggar who has found a priceless pearl and then dropped it into the sea. "What a beauty, what divine features, but what a terrible place to find them!..." That was all he could think of.

And it is true that nothing evokes in us such sad regret as the sight of beauty touched by the rotting breath of depravity. Far better that ugliness should take up the ways of debauchery, but not beauty, tender beauty... In our thoughts beauty is associated only with pure virtue and chastity. The beauty who had so bewitched our poor Piskarev was indeed a wonderful and extraordinary thing. Her presence in this despicable milieu was therefore all the more remarkable. All her features were so purely formed, her lovely face so eloquent of an inner nobility, that you would never have thought that depravity could have sunk its terrible claws into her. She would have been a priceless pearl, a universe, a Garden of Eden, an entire fortune for a loving husband; she would have been a lovely silent star in an

ordinary family constellation, issuing sweet commands with a single movement of her lovely lips. She would have been a goddess in a crowded ball-room, on a shining parquet floor, in the light of countless candles, and surrounded by the speechless devotion of a throng of admirers prostrate at her feet—but alas! by the terrible will of some infernal spirit, determined to destroy the harmony of life, she had been cast with a mocking laugh into the abyss.

Transfixed with agonizing pity he sat before a guttering candle. Midnight had long since passed, the tower bell was striking half past twelve, but he sat motionless, not asleep and not properly awake. A drowsiness crept over him, taking advantage of his stillness, and the room began to fade away, until only the light of the candle penetrated the dream which overtook his senses, when suddenly a knock on the door jolted him awake. The door opened to admit a footman in rich livery. The walls of his God-forsaken room had never before gazed on rich livery, to say nothing of the unusual hour of this visitation... Nonplussed, he regarded the footman with impatient curiosity.

"The lady," announced the footman with a respectful bow, "in whose presence your honour happened to be a few hours previous, requests that you be invited to her and has sent you her carriage."

Piskarev was speechless with surprise: a carriage, liveried footman... No, there must have been a mistake... "Listen, my good man," he said timidly, "it would seem you've come to the wrong place. Your mistress must clearly have sent you for someone else, not for me."

"No sir, I've come to the right place. Because it was yourself that was so good as to accompany the lady on foot to a house on Liteiny, to a room on the fourth floor, was it not?"

"It was."

"In that case if you don't mind we'll get moving, the lady is desirous to see you directly and requests you to go straight to her ladyship's house."

Piskarev flew down the stairs. Sure enough, there was a carriage in the street. He got in, the door was shut behind him, the coblestones rattled beneath the wheels and hooves—and the illuminated facades of the buildings with their bright signs flashed past the carriage windows. All the way Piskarev

pondered, unable to make head or tail of this adventure. Her own house, carriage, footman in rich livery ... he simply could not reconcile all this with the room on the fourth floor, the dirty windows and untuned piano.

The coach stopped at a brightly-lit doorway and he was at once amazed by the row of carriages, coachmen's voices, brightly lit windows and sounds of music. The liveried footman helped him down from the carriage and respectfully accompanied him through the brightly lit hall with its marble columns, doorman covered in gold braid, and cloaks and fur coats strewn all around. A staircase, seemingly suspended in mid-air, with a gleaming bannister led upwards through air heavy with perfume. He was already on the stairs, and entered the first hall, where he recoiled in fright at the sight of such a pressing mass of people. The extraordinary variety of faces totally unmanned him; it looked as though some demon had chopped the world up into hundreds of little pieces and jumbled them all together higgledy-piggledy. The radiant white shoulders of the ladies and the black tail-coats, the chandeliers and lamps, the shimmering gauze, the ethereal ribbons and the fat double-bass visible through the railings of the magnificent gallery—this was all too dazzling for him. Never before had he seen all at once so many venerable ancients and elderly gentlemen with stars on their dress-coats, or ladies gliding so proudly and gracefully along the parquet floor, or sitting in rows, or had he heard so much French and English spoken, and furthermore the young men in their black tail-coats had such noble bearing, conversed or remained silent with such dignity, exhibited such dexterity at saying the right thing, such skill in the bon mot, smiled so respectfully, sported such magnificent side-whiskers, and displayed their superb hands with such skill whilst adjusting a cravat, while the ladies were so ethereal, so utterly ravishing and content, and lowered their eyes so bewitchingly that ... but it was already obvious from a mere glance at Piskarev that he was utterly confused, as he leaned timorously against a column. At this moment the watchers formed a large circle, around the dancers, the ladies draped in the latest transparent creations from Paris, in dresses woven from air itself: they carelessly tripped along the dance floor in their bejewelled feet looking even more ethereal than if they had not touched it at all. But there was

one lovelier, more glorious and more exquisitely dressed than all the others. Her entire toilet displayed an ineffable, and infinitely refined taste, and yet she appeared completely unconcerned about her appearance as if it had come about of its own will. She looked at the surrounding crowd of spectators without appearing to see them, her lovely long eyelashes drooped with indifference and the gleaming whiteness of her face became even more dazzling when, as she bowed her head, a light shadow fell across her charming brow.

Piskarev exerted himself to the utmost to keep her within view, but to his great annoyance an enormous head with dark curly hair kept obscuring her, then the crowd so hemmed him in that he was unable to move either forwards or backwards for fear of bumping rudely into some privy councillor. But when he did manage to push himself forward he glanced at his own clothes, intending to smarten himself up. Heavens above, what did he see! he was wearing a frock coat, covered all over with paint; in his haste he had even forgotten to dress himself suitably. He flushed to the roots of his hair and, lowering his head, wished the ground would swallow him up, but there was absolutely nowhere he could vanish to: courtiers in brilliant uniforms closed together behind him to form a solid wall. Now he longed to be as far as possible from the beauty with the lovely brow and eyelashes. In fear and trepidation he raised his eyes to see whether she were looking at him and—God! she was standing in front of him... But what was this? what was this? "It's her!" he exclaimed practically at the top of his voice. And indeed it was her, the very one he had seen on Nevsky and followed to her home.

Meanwhile she raised her eyelashes and cast a radiant look about her. "Mmmmmmm, how lovely!..." was all he could say, catching his breath. She looked round the entire circle, all of whom longed to draw her attention, but soon she turned away from them with a bored nonchalance, and her eyes met those of Piskarev. Oh, how heavenly! sheer paradise! give me strength, Lord, to survive this! life cannot accommodate such beauty, it will destroy and carry off my soul! She gave him a sign—but not with her hand, nor with a nod of her head: this sign was expressed in her compelling eyes, expressed so subtly and imperceptibly that it was seen by no one but our hero, and he alone understood it. The dance went on for a long time; the

weary music would appear to be dying away and then would burst into life once more, shrill and strident; then at last! it was over. She sat down, her bosom heaving beneath its fine gauze veil; her hand (Lord, what a lovely hand!) fell on her knees, crushing her gossamer dress, which seemed to tremble with the music, while its delicate lilac hue set off the dazzling whiteness of her exquisite hand. Oh, only to touch her, and no more! He wished for no more, it would be audacious to ask for more... He stood behind her chair, not daring to speak or breathe. "Were you bored?" she asked. "I was also. I observe that you hate me..." she added, fluttering her eyelashes.

"Hate you! me? why..." poor, confused Piskarev was on the point of saying, and would surely have blurted out a stream of the most incoherent words, but at this moment a chamberlain, with his hair swept in a superb wave on top of his head, stepped up with a number of witty pleasantries. He smiled agreeably, displaying a row of rather good teeth and with each of his witticisms drove another sharp nail into Piskarev's heart. Finally he was saved by another guest who turned to the chamberlain with a question.

"Oh, it's unbearable!" she said, raising her heavenly eyes to look at him. "I'll be sitting at the other end of the room: be there!" She glided away and disappeared. He frantically elbowed his way through the crowd and was soon by her side.

And there she was, as regal and beautiful as a queen, searching for him with her eyes.

"Here you are," she said softly. "I will be sincere with you: no doubt the circumstances of our meeting struck you as strange. But surely you did not think that I could belong to that despicable class of humanity in whose company you encountered me? My actions will strike you as strange, but I will tell you a secret: are you capable," she said, fixing him with her eyes, "of never disclosing it?"

"Oh, I am, I am!..."

But at this moment a man, fairly well advanced in years, came up and said something to her in a language unfamiliar to Piskarev, offering her his hand. She gave Piskarev an imploring look, signalling him to stay where he was and wait for her to return, but he was in such a flurry of impatience that he was unable to obey any orders, even from her own lips. He set off in pursuit, but the crowd separated them. He could no

longer see the lilac dress; he wandered in agitation from one room to another, remorselessly shoving people out of his way, but everywhere important-looking guests sat at whist, immersed in a deathly silence. In one corner a small group of elderly people argued about the advantage of military over civil service; in another gentlemen in superb tail-coats effortlessly exchanged critical remarks on the many-volumed works of a hard-working poet. Piskarev felt an elderly gentleman of a most respectable appearance seize him by one of his coat buttons and submit for his deliberation a very correct observation, but Piskarev roughly pushed him aside, without even noticing the rather imposing order around the said gentleman's neck. Piskarev scuttled into another room—but she was not there. Into a third—not there either. "Where can she be? Oh give her back to me! I shall die if I don't set eyes on her again! I must hear what she was going to tell me." Alas, all his searching was in vain. Exhausted and agitated he squeezed into a corner and stared at the crowd; but the scene before his over-excited eyes started to grow dim. Finally he seemed to make out quite distinctly the walls of his own room. He lifted his eyes; before him he saw the candlestick, in which the candle had burnt down so low it had almost gone out, spilling melted tallow onto his table.

So he had been asleep! Good God, what a dream! But why had he woken up? Why did he not wait one minute: she would surely have reappeared! The bleak, unwelcome face of dawn appeared at his windows, shedding its cold grey light over the disorder of his room... Oh, how repulsive was reality! How could he face it after his dream? He swiftly undressed and climbed into his bed, wrapping himself in a blanket, longing to recall his lost dream if only for a moment. Sleep indeed wasted no time answering his call, but the visions it brought were very different from the ones Piskarev wanted to see: first lieutenant Pirogov smoking his pipe, then the Academy watchman, then a full state councillor, the head of a Finnish woman who had once sat for him and suchlike rubbish.

He lay on in bed until midday, longing for sleep, but she did not come to him. If he could only for one moment glimpse her lovely features, or hear her dainty footsteps, or sense her naked arm, as dazzling white as driven snow, flit before his eyes.

Casting all other thoughts from his mind he sat there feeling utterly dejected, filled with thoughts of his dream. He had no desire to do anything; his eyes stared dully and listlessly out of the window, which looked onto the yard where a grubby water-carrier was dispensing water which froze in the air, and a rag-and-bone man bleated in his tremulous, goat-like voice, "Sell your old clothes!" These sounds of everyday reality rang strange in his ears. He sat on in this manner until evening and threw himself eagerly into his bed. For a long time he struggled against insomnia before finally dropping off to sleep. Once again he had some vile, banal dream. Dear God, have mercy: show me her, if only for a minute, for a single minute! Once again he impatiently waited for evening to fall, and hurried to sleep, and once again he dreamt of some civil servant, who was at one and the same time a civil servant and a bassoon; no, this was unbearable! But at last she came! her lovely head and hair ... she was looking... Oh, how soon it was over! again a mist settled over the scene and another stupid dream took its place.

In the end he started to live only for his dreams, and from this moment his existence took a strange turn: it was as though he slept during his waking life and was only awake when he slept. If he were seen by anyone as he sat speechless at an empty table or wandered along the street they would be sure to think him a sleep-walker or a man ruined by heavy drinking; his gaze was completely vacant, congenital absent-mindedness had finally developed to the point of banishing all feeling and movement from his face. He came to life only as night fell.

This state of mind completely sapped his strength, and the worst of it was that in the end sleep abandoned him altogether. In a bid to preserve his only treasure he did everything possible to repossess it. He had heard that there was only one sound way of overcoming insomnia: by taking opium. But where was he to get this opium? He recalled a Persian shopkeeper, a seller of scarves, who almost invariably used to ask Piskarev, whenever he saw him, to paint him a pretty girl. He decided to turn to him, on the assumption that he would surely have some opium. The Persian received him sitting on his divan with his legs folded beneath him. "What do you want opium for?" he asked. Piskarev told him about his insomnia. "All right, I give you some opium, but you paint me pretty girl. And she must

be very pretty. With black eyebrows and eyes as big as olives, and with me lying next to her and smoking my pipe—you hear? she must be very, very beautiful girl!"

Piskarev promised to do as he said. The Persian went out and returned shortly with a small jar filled with a dark liquid, some of which he carefully poured into another jar and handed to Piskarev with the strict instructions not to use more than seven drops in water at a time. The artist eagerly seized this priceless jar, which he would not have exchanged for a pile of solid gold, and dashed home.

On arrival he poured a few drops into a glass of water and swallowing it, threw himself on his bed.

Lord God, what bliss! It was her, her again! But now he saw her in quite a different aspect. Oh, how pretty she looked, sitting by the window of a bright wooden cottage! Her dress was simplicity itself, as simple as the weave of a poet's thought. And her coiffure... Heavens above, how simply her hair was dressed, and how well it suited her! A small kerchief rested against her slender neck; everything about her was modest, her entire person bespoke a secret and exquisite taste. How sweetly and gracefully she moved! How musical the sound of her footsteps and the rustle of her simple dress! How lovely her arm, encircled by a hair bracelet! She spoke to him with a tear in her eyes: "Do not despise me: I'm really not the person you take me for. Just look at me, look long and hard and tell me: could I really be capable of what you think?" "Oh no, no, no! And if anyone should dare to think it I shall..." But at that he awoke, deeply moved, tormented, with tears in his eyes. Better that you had never existed! that you had never lived in this world, but had been the creation of some inspired artist! I would never have moved away from the canvas, I would have gazed upon you for ever and kissed you. I would have lived and breathed you, like a glorious dream, and I would have been happy. I would have asked for nothing more. I would have summoned you like my guardian angel before going to sleep and awakening, and I would have waited for you whenever I wished to portray anything divine and sacred. But now ... what a terrible life I am forced to live! what is the good of such a life? What pleasure can the life of a madman give his friends and relations who once loved him? God, what a life we lead! Our dreams are constantly at war with reality!" Thoughts

of this kind constantly occupied him. He could think of nothing, ate almost nothing and would wait for evening and his longed-for dream with impatience, with the passion of a lover. This obsession finally so gripped his entire being and imagination that his longed-for image would appear to him almost every day, and always in a role directly contradictory to reality, because his mind was so perfectly pure, like the mind of a child. Through the prism of these visions the object itself somehow became pure and transfigured.

The effects of the opium further inflamed his thoughts, and if ever someone was in love to the last degree of insanity, terribly, frantically, destructively, rebelliously in love, this unfortunate person was Piskarev.

There was one dream which brought him more joy than all the rest: he saw his studio, and himself in it, joyfully, with such delight wielding his palette! And she was beside him. She was by now his wife. She sat next to him, leaning her charming elbow on the back of his chair, and looking at his work. Manifest in her eyes, so sultry, so weary, was the burden of bliss; everything in his room breathed paradise; it was so bright and tidy. Heavens above! she was leaning her lovely head on his chest... This was the best dream he had ever had. After it he felt somehow fresher and less distraught than before. Strange thoughts came into his head: "Perhaps," he thought, "she was drawn into her depraved ways by some terrible incident not of her own devising; perhaps her soul is inclined towards repentance; perhaps she wishes to tear herself away from this terrible condition. And how can I stand by indifferently and let her perish when I need only hold out my hand to save her from drowning?" His train of thought ran on still further. "No one knows me," he said to himself, "and why should they care about me—or me about them, for that matter. If she declares herself properly repentant and changes her life I will marry her. I must marry her and in doing so surely I will be doing far more good than many of those who marry their housekeepers and often even the vilest of creatures. But my action will be utterly disinterested and may even be a great deed. I will return to the world its most beautiful adornment."

As he drew up this rather impractical plan he felt the colour flooding into his cheeks and going up to the mirror was alarmed to behold his sunken cheeks and sallow complexion.

He painstakingly set about sprucing himself up; he washed, smoothed down his hair, put on a new dress-coat, a stylish waistcoat, threw on his cloak and stepped out onto the street. He inhaled the fresh air and felt a breath of freshness in his heart, like a person who has just recovered from a lengthy illness and resolves to make his first sally outside. His heart pounded as he drew nearer to the street on which he had not set foot since that fateful encounter.

He hunted for the house for a long time; it seemed as though his memory had betrayed him. Twice he walked the entire length of the street and did not know at which house to stop. At last one of them struck him as more likely than the others. He swiftly ascended the stairs and knocked at the door: it opened and who should come out to meet him? His ideal, his sacred image, the original of the pictures in his dreams, the person he lived for, so terribly, with such torment, such sweet longing. She herself stood before him. He began to tremble; he had hardly enough strength to stay on his feet, as he succumbed to this rush of joy. She stood before him as lovely as he had imagined her, except that her eyes were sleepy, and a pallor crept over her face which was not as fresh as he had seen it, but she was lovely just the same.

"Oh!" she exclaimed on seeing Piskarev, and rubbed her eyes (it was already two o'clock). "Why did you run away from us that time?"

He collapsed into a chair and stared at her.

"And I've only just woken up: they brought me back at seven o'clock this morning. I was completely drunk," she added with a smile.

Oh, better you were dumb and had your tongue cut out than to utter such statements! With these few words she had demonstrated to him the full panorama of her life. However, despite this, he steeled himself, determined to see whether his admonitions would have any effect on her. Plucking up all his courage he started describing to her in a trembling and at the same time ardent voice the full horror of her position. She listened with an attentive air and the sort of surprised look we display on espying something strange and unexpected. With a slight smile she glanced at her friend, sitting in the corner, who had stopped cleaning her comb and was also listening to this preacher with interest.

"It's true, I'm poor," Piskarev concluded his long and edifying exhortation, "but we will work hard, we'll struggle together to improve our lot. There is nothing more satisfying than to owe nothing to anybody. I will sit at my easel, and you, seated beside me, will inspire my work, as you embroider, or occupy yourself with other needlework, and we will not be lacking in anything."

"What an idea!" she interrupted him with an expression of contempt. "I'm not a laundress or a seamstress, to be putting myself to work."

Dear God! in these words she expressed all the despicable baseness of her life, a life of futility and indolence, the faithful companions of debauchery.

"Marry me!" interjected her friend with an impudent look, having sat in silence until this point in the corner. "If you make me your wife I'll sit like this!" on which her wretched face took on a stupid expression, which her lovely companion found extraordinarily funny.

No, this was simply too much! this he was unable to take! He fled headlong, numbed in mind and senses. His head spun: he wandered about all day long in a stupor, seeing, hearing and feeling nothing. No one knows whether he slept anywhere or not; only on the following day did some blind instinct lead him to his lodgings, pale, and ghastly to behold, with unkempt hair and the stamp of insanity on his face. He locked himself into his room and admitted no one, neither did he require anything. Four days passed and never once did his door open; finally, a week elapsed and the room was still locked. The neighbours pounded on the door and called out to him, but they got no reply; finally they broke the door down and found his lifeless body with its throat cut. A bloody razor lay where it had fallen on the floor. It could be concluded from the twisted angle of his outflung arms and the terrible grimace on his face that his hand had trembled and that he had suffered a long agony before his sinner's soul had departed his body.

Thus died poor Piskarev, victim of an insane passion, a man so quiet, timid, modest, childishly naive, and gifted with a spark of talent that in time might have flared up to dazzle all with its breadth and intensity. No one lamented his passing, no one stood beside his lifeless body other than the inevitable figures of the police superintendent and the impassive police

physician. His coffin was quietly borne to the Okhta cemetery, without benefit of any religious ritual; only one person walked behind it, weeping, and that was the watchman, and he wept because he had drunk a bottle of vodka too many. Even Lieutenant Pirogov did not come to look at the body of this unfortunate wretch to whom during his lifetime he had extended his lofty patronage. Indeed, he had far better things to do with his time: he was involved in a rather odd business. But we shall return to him.

I do not like corpses and I find it extremely unpleasant when my path is crossed by a long funeral cortege accompanied by an invalid soldier, in the likeness of a Capuchin monk, and taking snuff from his left hand, because his right is holding the funeral torch. I always feel vexed at the sight of a rich catafalque and a velvet coffin; but my vexation is mingled with sadness when I see a carter hauling along a completely undraped red coffin, with only a beggar-woman, who had met them at some crossroads, trailing along behind, for lack of anything better to do.

If I remember rightly, we left Lieutenant Pirogov taking his leave from poor Piskarev and dashing in pursuit of his blonde. This blonde was a pretty but rather fickle creature. She paused before every shop and examined the objects in the window, the ribbons, headscarves, earrings, gloves and other knick-knacks, fluttering this way and that, forever gazing about her and turning round. "Got you, my pretty!" crowed Pirogov exultantly, continuing his pursuit and turning up his collar to hide his face, lest he bump into any acquaintances. But it would be a good idea at this point to tell our readers more about this Lieutenant Pirogov.

Before we tell you who Lieutenant Pirogov was it would be apposite to say something about the society to which Pirogov belonged. There is a category of officers in St. Petersburg who constitute a middle class of their own. One of their number will invariably be found at a soirée or dinner given by a State Councillor, who has received this rank at the cost of forty years of service. A handful of pallid daughters, as totally devoid of colour as St. Petersburg itself, some of whom are getting a little long in the tooth, a table set for tea, a piano-forte, a home dance—this is all inseparably associated with the glittering epaulette, framed in the lamp light between a virtuous blonde

on one side and the black dress-coat of her brother, or a family friend on the other. It is extremely hard to rouse these cool maidens to a smile; to do this you have to be extremely artful, or, to be more precise, totally artless. You have to make conversation in a way that is neither too clever, nor too funny, keeping to that trivial note which is so dear to women. This is an exercise in which the aforesaid gentlemen, to give them their due, excel. They have the gift of being able to make these insipid beauties laugh and listen. Exclamations stifled by laughter such as "No, please desist! You shall make me die laughing!" are often their greatest reward. In the very highest circles they are encountered rarely, or to be more precise, never. They have been utterly ousted by what in this society are called aristocrats; nevertheless they are regarded as scholars and educated people. They love to hold forth about literature; they praise Bulgarin, Pushkin and Grech and talk with contempt and barbed witticisms about A.A. Orlov. They never miss a public lecture, whether it be on book-keeping, or even forestry. You will always find one of them in the theatre, even for a performance of some "Filatka" vaudeville, which he will find most offensive to his fastidious taste. They are perennial habitués of the theatre. These are the theatrical manager's ideal spectators. They are particularly fond of good verse in a play, and will loudly applaud their favourite actors; many of them, through teaching in state institutions or cramming students for these institutions, can eventually splash out on a cabriolet and pair of horses. This leads to a widening of their circle: they finally achieve their ambition of marrying a merchant's daughter, who can play the piano, and has a tidy dowry of a hundred thousand or thereabouts, and large numbers of bearded relations. However, they cannot aspire to this honour before they have at last attained the rank of colonel. The Russian bearded classes, despite the fact that they give off a distinct smell of cabbage, will on no account marry their daughter to anyone with a rank lower than general, or at the very least, colonel. Such are the main attributes of this class of young people. But lieutenant Pirogov had a large number of talents, peculiar to himself. He could declaim with great effect lines from such classics as *Dimitri Donskoi* and *Woe from Wit,* and was particularly skilful at releasing smoke-rings from his pipe, frequently achieving volleys of up to ten successive rings.

He was adept at relating anecdotes like the one about the difference between a cannon and a unicorn. In fact, it would be rather hard to list all the talents with which nature had endowed Pirogov. He liked to talk about actresses and dancers, but in a far less outspoken manner than that in which young ensigns are wont to discuss this subject. He was extremely content with his rank, to which he had been promoted quite recently, and although when lying down on his divan he would sometimes groan: "Oh dear! The vanity of life! What does it matter that I am a lieutenant?" he was secretly very flattered by his new position of merit; in conversation he would always try to bring it in à propos, and once when he encountered a clerk on the street who struck him as insufficiently deferential he at once stopped the latter and gave him to know in so many words that he was dealing with a lieutenant and not just any old officer. He took particular pains to express this in as eloquent terms as possible because at that moment two extremely attractive ladies were walking past. Pirogov in general nourished a passion for everything refined, and liked to patronize his artist friend Piskarev; this, however, was perhaps prompted by his earnest desire to see his own manly visage grace one of the latter's canvases. But enough about Pirogov's qualities. Man is such a marvellous creation that it is quite impossible to list all his merits in a single attempt, for the closer you look the more features you will discern, and their description could go on for ever.

Thus, Pirogov continued to pursue his fair stranger, from time to time addressing questions to her which she answered sharply, curtly and rather inarticulately. They entered Meshchanskaya Street through the dark Kazan gates, a street of tobacconists and bric-a-brac stalls, of German craftsmen and Finnish wenches. The blonde ran along faster and flitted through the entrance to a rather shabby building. Pirogov went with her. She flew up a dark, narrow staircase and passed through a doorway, which Pirogov also boldly entered. He found himself in a large room with blackened walls and a smoky ceiling. A pile of metal bolts and locksmith's tools, gleaming coffee-pots and candlesticks lay on the table; the floor was littered with brass and iron shavings. Pirogov saw at once that this was the workshop of a craftsman. The fair stranger flew on through a side door. Pirogov hesitated for a moment but, acting

true to his Russian nature, resolved to go ahead. He entered a room quite unlike the first, the great neatness of which indicated that the master of the house was a German. Here he was stopped in his tracks by a most remarkable sight.

Before him sat Schiller, not the Schiller who wrote *Wilhelm Tell* and the *History of the Thirty Years' War,* but another Schiller, one tinsmith residing at Meshchanskaya Street. Beside Schiller stood Hoffmann, not Hoffmann the writer but a rather good shoemaker from Offitserskaya Street, and a great friend of Schiller's. Schiller was drunk and was sitting on a chair stamping his foot and heatedly making some point. None of this would have seemed particularly strange to Pirogov, had it not been for the most extraordinary disposition of the figures. Schiller was seated, with his well-fleshed nose thrust forward and his head held high; while Hoffmann was gripping onto this nose with two fingers and wielding the blade of his shoemaker's knife in close proximity to its skin. Both of them were talking in the German language, and thus Lieutenant Pirogov, who in German could only say "Gut Morgen", was unable to understand any of this business. The gist of what Schiller was saying was as follows:

"I don't want it, I don't need a nose!" he said, waving his arms... "That nose alone costs me three pounds of snuff a month. And I have to buy it in a filthy Russian shop because the German shop does not keep Russian snuff, I pay 40 kopecks to the filthy Russian shop for every pound; that means one rouble twenty kopecks, and twelve times one rouble twenty kopecks comes to fourteen roubles forty kopecks. Do you hear, Hoffmann my friend? my nose alone costs me fourteen roubles forty kopecks. And then on holidays I take rapé snuff because I don't want to take that filthy Russian snuff on holidays. In a year I use two pounds of rapé at two roubles a pound. Six and fourteen—twenty roubles forty copecks on snuff alone! That's robbery, now, isn't it, Hoffmann my friend?" Hoffmann, who was also drunk, answered in the affirmative. "Twenty roubles forty copecks! I am a German from Swabia, I have a king in Germany. I don't want my nose! Cut off my nose! Take away my nose!"

And if it had not been for Lieutenant Pirogov's sudden entry there is no doubt but that Hoffmann would have severed Schiller's nose without further ado, because he already held his

knife poised for all the world as if he were about to cut out a new leather sole.

Schiller was very annoyed that this sudden intrusion by a stranger, an uninvited guest, should have interfered with his plan. Although he was borne along by an intoxicating haze of beer and wine, he was aware that it is a little unseemly to show oneself in such a state and performing such an action to a complete outsider. Meanwhile Pirogov described a slight bow and pronounced with his customary courteousness: "I do beg your pardon..."

"Get out!..." slurred Schiller in reply.

This retort nonplussed Lieutenant Pirogov. It was for him an entirely unfamiliar form of address. The faint smile which had appeared on his face instantly vanished. With a sense of offended dignity he continued "I beg your pardon, my good sir ... perhaps you did not remark ... that I am an officer..."

"Vot iss an officer! I am German from Swabia. Me too" (at which point Schiller pounded on the table with his fist) "will be officer: one and half year cadet, two year lieutenant, now tomorrow I am officer. But I don't want to serve. I make viz officer zo: poof!" here Schiller held out his palm and blew on it.

Lieutenant Pirogov could see that he had no choice but to retreat; however, this treatment, so unbefitting one of his station, was most displeasing to him. He paused several times on the staircase, as if wishing to recover his presence of mind and consider how to repay Schiller for his rudeness. Finally he concluded that Schiller could be forgiven, as somewhat the worse for beer, and then he remembered the pretty blonde and decided to let the matter rest. Early the following morning Lieutenant Pirogov appeared in the locksmith's workshop. He was met in the front room by the comely blonde who asked him in a severe voice, most becoming to her pretty face: "What can I do for you?"

"Aha, good day my darling! don't you recognize me? you little minx, what lovely eyes you have!" At this Pirogov was about to chuck her under the chin in the nicest fashion with his finger, but the blonde gasped in fright and asked just as sternly as before: "What can I do for you?"

"Apart from you yourself I require nothing," replied Lieutenant Pirogov, with a pleasant smile, stepping a little

closer; but observing that the timid blonde was about to disappear through the door he added: "I want to order some spurs, my darling. Can you make me some spurs? although I need no spurs to love you, a bridle would be more to the point. What lovely hands!" Lieutenant Pirogov was always very lavish with complimentary declarations of this sort.

"I shall call my husband right away," exclaimed the German blonde and went out of the room, which was entered a few minutes later by Schiller, eyes still heavy with sleep after his binge. As he looked at the officer he vaguely remembered, as if in a dream, that something had happened the previous evening. He could not remember the exact details, but felt that he had done something stupid, and therefore received the officer with a most forbidding expression. "I can't do spurs for less than fifteen rubles a pair," he stated, wishing to get rid of Pirogov; as an honest German he found it extremely shaming to have to face someone who had seen him in such an unseemly state. Schiller liked to drink entirely without witnesses, with only two or three friends, and at such times locked himself away even from his apprentices.

"Why so expensive?" asked Pirogov persuasively.

"German work," replied Schiller coolly, stroking his chin. "A Russian will do it for two rubles."

"As a sign of my respect for you and my wish to be acquainted with you, I am willing to pay fifteen rubles".

Schiller hesitated: as an honest German he felt somewhat ashamed. Wishing to reject the order he announced that he could not do them in less than two weeks. But Pirogov declared himself entirely agreeable, without the least equivocation.

The German thought hard how best to do his work so that it would indeed be worth fifteen rubles. At this moment the blonde came into the workshop and started to rummage amongst the coffee-pots on the table. The lieutenant availed himself of Schiller's reverie to step across to her and squeeze her arm, which was bare to the shoulder. Schiller was most displeased by this.

"Mein Frau!" he shouted.

"Was wollen Sie doch?" answered the blonde.

"Gensie zum kitchen!"—whereupon the blonde departed.

"So they'll be ready in two weeks?" asked Pirogov.

"Yes, in two weeks," answered Schiller pensively: "I have very much work now."

"Goodbye! I shall call for them."

"Goodbye," answered Schiller, locking the door after him.

Lieutenant Pirogov decided not to abandon his solicitations, even though the German blonde had so obviously rebuffed him. He could not understand how anyone could be able to resist him; especially since his personal charms and exalted rank gave him every right to attention. We should here point out that Schiller's wife, for all her prettiness, was very stupid. However, stupidity is a great asset in a pretty wife. At any rate I have known many husbands who go into raptures about the stupidity of their wives and see in them all the attributes of babe-like innocence. Beauty performs veritable miracles. All mental defects in a beautiful woman, instead of provoking revulsion, somehow become extraordinarily attractive; in them vice itself strikes us as comely and harmless; but should she lack beauty a woman must be twenty times as clever as a man in order to command respect at least, if not love. In addition, Schiller's wife, for all her stupidity, had always been true to her matrimonial vows, and thus Pirogov had many obstacles in the way of his bold undertaking; but the greater the obstacles to be overcome the sweeter the victory, and he became daily more and more obsessed by his pursuit. He started to make frequent visits to enquire about his spurs, and in the end Schiller lost patience. He redoubled his efforts to finish the spurs as soon as possible; and soon they were ready.

"Ah, what excellent work!" exclaimed Lieutenant Pirogov on seeing his new spurs. "Heavens, what a fine job you've done! Even our general's spurs aren't a patch on these."

A warm glow of satisfaction spread through Schiller. His eyes took on a merry sparkle and he felt completely reconciled to Pirogov. "This Russian officer's a smart fellow," he thought to himself.

"In that case I suppose you could make a mounting for a dagger?"

"Vy, off course," said Schiller with a smile.

"Well, I'd like a dagger mounted. I'll bring it in; I have this very nice Turkish dagger, but I'd like a different scabbard for it."

Schiller was dumbfounded by this new request. His face darkened. "Confound it!" he thought, inwardly cursing himself for having brought the work on himself. He felt it dishonourable to refuse, especially since the Russian officer had praised his work. With a slight shake of his head he expressed his agreement, but the kiss which Pirogov, on his way out, brazenly planted right on the pretty blonde's lips, completely floored him.

At this point I think it might be a good idea to acquaint the reader somewhat more closely with Schiller. Schiller was German to the backbone. Right from the age of twenty, that happy age when the Russian lives any old how, Schiller had planned out his entire life, and never made the least deviation, not on any account. He resolved to rise at seven, lunch at two, be punctual in everything and get drunk on Sundays. He determined to earn himself a capital of fifty thousand in the course of ten years, and this was as sure and incontrovertible as fate itself, for a civil servant is more likely to forget to present himself in his superior's anteroom than a German is to go against his word. On no account would he ever increase his expenses, and if the price of potatoes rose above its usual level he would not increase his budget by a single kopeck, reducing instead the quantity he purchased. Although at times he was forced to go hungry, he nonetheless became accustomed to this. His punctiliousness even extended to the point that he deemed it proper to kiss his wife no more than twice a day, and to ensure that he would not give her an extra kiss he was careful never to put more than one spoon of pepper in his soup. On Sundays this rule was not so strictly observed, because on these days Schiller would drink two bottles of beer and one bottle of caraway vodka, a beverage which, however, he always abused. In his drinking habits he was not at all like an Englishman, who will lock his door the moment he has done eating and tripple in solitude. On the contrary, as a German he always drank with inspiration, either in company with the shoemaker Hoffmann, or with the carpenter Kuntz, also a German and a great drunkard. Such was the character of the worthy Schiller, who now found himself in such an awkward position. Phlegmatic though he was and a German to boot, Pirogov's antics nonetheless provoked in him something not unlike jealousy. He pondered long and hard and was

unable to decide how to get rid of this Russian officer. Meanwhile Pirogov, smiling pleasantly and smoking his pipe in the company of his comrades, made significant allusions to an intrigue with a pretty German, with whom, in his own words, he was already on the closest possible terms but whose favour he, in actual fact, was almost despairing of winning.

One day he was strolling along Meshchanskaya, contemplating the building adorned by Schiller's sign with its coffee-pots and samovars when, to his great delight, he espied the pretty head of his blonde, hanging out of a window, watching the passers-by. He stopped, waved and said: "Gut Morgen!" The blonde nodded in answer as to an acquaintance.

"Say, is your husband at home?"

"He is," answered the blonde,

"And when is he not at home?"

"He's not at home on Sundays," said the foolish blonde.

"Capital," thought Pirogov: "We must turn that to our advantage."—And the following Sunday, like a bolt from the blue, he appeared before the object of his desire. Sure enough, Schiller was not at home... The pretty mistress of the house was alarmed; but this time Pirogov proceeded with caution. He behaved with great respect and gave her a deep bow, showing off all the elegance of his supple torso in this taut position. He delivered himself of a few amusing and respectful witticisms, but the foolish Frau only answered in monosyllables. Finally, having deployed all his wiles and seen that nothing was of any avail, he invited her to dance. She agreed at once, because German ladies are always extremely fond of dancing. Pirogov had set great store by this: first, it gave her a certain amount of pleasure, secondly, it would show off his physique and agility, and thirdly, as dancing allows one a great degree of proximity, he would be able to embrace his partner and lay the foundations for further intimacies. In other words, he foresaw a complete triumph. He began with a gavotte, knowing that with German ladies you have to take things gradually. Frau Schiller stepped out into the middle of the room and raised a pretty foot. This posture so delighted Pirogov that he rushed to embrace her. At this she cried out in protest which only increased her charm in Pirogov's eyes; he smothered her with kisses. Suddenly the door opened and in

walked Schiller with Hoffmann and Kuntz the carpenter. All these worthy craftsmen were as drunk as lords.

But I will allow the reader to picture to himself Schiller's rage and indignation.

"Blackguard!" he shouted in extreme displeasure "how dare you kiss my wife? You are a villain and not Russian officer. Dammit, Hoffmann my friend, I am a German and not Russian swine is it not so?" Hoffmann answered in the affirmative. "Oh no, I don't want to grow horns! Grab him by the scruff of his neck, Hoffmann my friend, I don't want to," he continued, frantically waving his arms, the effort turning his face as red as the cloth of his waistcoat. "I am living eight years in Saint Petersburg, I have my mother in Swabia and my uncle in Nürnberg, I am a German and not a cattle mit horns! Away with him, Hoffmann my friend! Hold him von his hand and foot, Kuntz mein Kamerad!" And the Germans seized Pirogov by his arms and legs.

In vain did he struggle to free himself: these three craftsmen were the sturdiest of all the St. Petersburg Germans and they dealt with him in a manner so rough and impolite that I confess I cannot find words to describe this lamentable occurrence.

We can be sure that the next day Schiller was in a proper fever and that he trembled like a leaf, awaiting the arrival of the police, and that he would have given his very last pfennig to turn the events of the previous day into a dream. But we cannot alter what has been. No words can describe Pirogov's indignation and rage. The mere thought of this fearful humiliation reduced him to a fury. Siberia and the whip were in his opinion the very least punishment Schiller deserved. He flew home to dress and proceed forthwith to his general; here he would paint in the most lurid colours the unruly conduct of the German craftsmen. At the same time he intended to deliver a written complaint to Military Headquarters. Should the punishment decided on not meet with his satisfaction he would take the matter to the Tsar himself.

But things turned out rather strangely: on the way he called in at a pastry-shop, ate two puff-pastries, read an article in the *Northern Bee*, and continued on his way feeling a lot less angry. Moreover, as it was such a pleasantly cool evening he decided to take a stroll along Nevsky; by 9 o'clock he had

calmed down and realised the imprudence of disturbing generals on a Sunday, and, furthermore, his general would undoubtedly have been called away somewhere. Accordingly he set off to spend the evening at the home of a director of the control collegiate, where he could always be sure to find a most pleasant array of civil servants and officers. There he spent an agreeable evening and so distinguished himself in the execution of the mazurka that he delighted not only the ladies but even their escorts.

"What an amazing world we live in!" I thought to myself the day before yesterday as I walked along Nevsky musing over these two stories: "How strange, how inscrutable the games fate plays with us! Do we ever attain the object of our desires? Do we ever achieve that to which all our efforts seem to be directed? Everything happens the wrong way round. To one providence has given a pair of splendid horses, and he rides along indifferently, oblivious to their beauty, while another, whose heart is fired with a passion for horses, is forced to go on foot and content himself with clicking his tongue at the passing pacers. One fellow has an excellent cook, but, alas, such a small mouth that it cannot accommodate more than two pieces of meat, while another has a mouth as big as the arch of the General Staff building but, alas, has to content himself with some sort of German concoction of potatoes. What strange games fate plays with us indeed!"

But strangest of all are the things which happen on Nevsky Prospekt. Oh, have no faith in this Nevsky Prospekt! I always wrap my cloak tighter around me when I walk along it and endeavour not to look at the objects I pass. It is all deception, a dream, not what it seems! You think that that gentleman promenading in an excellently cut frock coat is very rich? Nothing of the sort: his entire fortune is in his frock coat. You imagine that those two stout fellows, who have paused to watch builders at work on a church, are discussing its architecture?—Not a bit of it: they are remarking on the strange way two crows have alighted facing one another. You think that that excitable chap waving his arms is describing how his wife threw a crumpled-up piece of paper out of the window at some officer whom he did not know from Adam?—Not at all: he's talking about Lafayette. You think that those ladies ... but trust the ladies least of all. Try to keep your eyes away from the

shop windows: the knick-knacks displayed in them are fine to look at but they are redolent of large sums of money. Pray that the Lord keep you from peeking under the ladies' bonnets! However enticingly a lady's cloak may billow in the distance I would never, not on any account, chase after it for a closer look. Keep your distance, I implore you, from the streetlamps! and hurry past them quickly, as quickly as possible. Count yourself lucky if they spill their malodorous oil on your stylish frock coat. But everything, not only the streetlamp, exudes deceit. Nevsky Prospekt deceives at all hours of day, but the worst time of all is at night, when darkness spreads over it like a blanket and only the white and beige walls of the buildings can be discerned, when the entire city becomes a bedlam of noise and flashing lights, when myriads of carriages rattle down from the bridges, the postilions cry out and prance on their horses and when the devil himself is abroad, kindling the streetlamps with the sole purpose of showing everything in a false light.

1834

THE NOSE

I

On March 25 a most extraordinary occurrence took place in St. Petersburg. The barber Ivan Yakovlevich, resident of Voznesensky Avenue (his surname has been lost, and does not even appear on his shop sign, which depicts a gentleman with a well-soaped cheek and the legend: "Blood-letting also performed"), the barber Ivan Yakovlevich woke up early one morning and caught the smell of hot bread. Raising himself slightly on his bed he saw that his wife, a most respectable lady, with a great partiality for coffee, was drawing freshly baked loaves from the oven.

"Today, Praskovya Osipovna, I shall not drink coffee," announced Ivan Yakovlevich: "instead I would like to eat a hot loaf with onion." (In fact, Ivan Yakovlevich would have liked coffee too, but he knew that it would be totally futile to ask for both at once, for Praskovya Osipovna took a very dim view of such caprices). "Let the old fool eat bread, all the better for me," thought his wife: "I'll get an extra cup of coffee." And she tossed a loaf onto the table.

For the sake of decency Ivan Yakovlevich put a coat on top of his night shirt, and seating himself at the table, poured out some salt, peeled two onions, took hold of a knife and, with an air of the utmost gravity, set about slicing his loaf. Cutting it in half he glanced inside and, to his great surprise, saw something white. He cautiously prodded it with his knife and poked at it with his finger. "Feels firm..." he thought, "what on earth can it be?"

He stuck in his fingers and pulled out—a nose!... At this his hands fell to his sides; he then rubbed his eyes and felt the object: yes, a nose, no doubt about it! and even, it seemed, a familiar nose. An expression of horror crept over Ivan Yakovlevich's face. But this horror was nothing compared to the indignation that overtook his lady wife.

"Where did you cut off that nose, you butcher?" she shrieked, livid with rage. "You villian! Drunkard! I'll report you to the police myself. Downright criminal! I've already been told by three people how you tug at their noses so hard while you're shaving them that it's a wonder they stay on at all."

But Ivan Yakovlevich was struck dumb. He had recognized the nose as belonging to none other than Collegiate Assessor Kovalev, whom he shaved every Wednesday and Sunday.

"Wait, Praskovya Osipovna! I'll wrap it up in a cloth and put it over there in the corner: let it sit there for a little while, then I'll take it away."

"Not another word! You think that I'd allow a cut-off nose to sit in my room?... You numskull! All you're good at is stropping your razor, and soon you won't be able to do your job properly at all, you stupid oaf! You scoundrel! You think I'm going to stand up for you to the police?... No fear, you good-for-nothing, you blockhead! Take it away! Away! Wherever you like, just don't let me set eyes on it again!"

Ivan Yakovlevich stood there dumbfounded. He wracked his brains, feeling utterly flummoxed. "Devil knows how it happened," he said finally, scratching behind his ear. "Perhaps I came home drunk last night, or perhaps not, I can't say. But on the face of it this is altogether ridiculous; I mean, bread is something you bake and a nose is nothing of the kind. It's a mystery to me!..." Ivan Yakovlevich fell silent. The thought of the police finding him with the nose and arresting him terrified him. He could already see in his mind's eye the red collar, with its fine silver braiding, the sword ... and he shuddered from head to toe. Finally he picked up his undershirt and boots, pulled them on and, to the accompaniment of Praskovya Osipovna's baleful injunctions, he wrapped the nose in a cloth and stepped out onto the street.

He wanted to secrete it away somewhere, perhaps sticking it behind a curbstone by the gates or inadvertently dropping it

somewhere, and then popping down the nearest side-street. But to his chagrin he kept on bumping into acquaintances, who pestered him: "Where are you going?" or: "Who are you going to shave at this early hour?" leaving Ivan Yakovlevich no chance to carry out his scheme. Once he did manage to drop it, but a duty policeman called to him, pointing with his halberd: "Hey you! You've dropped something!" And Ivan Yakovlevich had to pick the nose up and stuff it in his pocket. He was beginning to despair because the street was filling with people as the shops and stalls opened for the day.

He decided to make for the Isakievsky bridge, where, with luck, he'd be able to throw it into the Neva... But I have been guilty of a slight oversight here, in that I have so far omitted to tell you anything about Ivan Yakovlevich, a person commanding esteem in many respects.

Ivan Yakovlevich, like every self-respecting Russian craftsman, was a frightful drunkard. And although every day of the week he shaved other people's chins, his own was invariably unshaven. Ivan Yakovlevich's tails (for Ivan Yakovlevich never wore a frock coat) was pie-bald, that is it was black, but covered in yellowy-brown and grey blotches; the collar was shiny, and instead of three buttons there were only threads dangling in front. Ivan Yakovlevich was a great cynic, and when, as was his wont, Collegiate Assessor Kovalev remarked to him during his shave: "Ivan Yakovlevich, your hands always stink!" Ivan Yakovlevich would retort: "I don't see how they could."—"I don't know, old man, but they do," the Collegiate Assessor would say, and Ivan Yakovlevich, taking a pinch of snuff, would counter this by soaping him on his cheeks, under his nose, behind his ears, and beneath his chin, in other words, wherever he fancied.

This worthy citizen had by now reached Isakievsky bridge. First of all he looked round; then leaned over the railings as if to look under the bridge, to ascertain whether there were a lot of fish that day, and stealthily dropped the cloth containing the nose. He felt as though a ton weight had been lifted from his shoulders: Ivan Yakovlevich even chuckled. Instead of going back to shave the chins of civil servants he turned his steps towards an establishment fronted by the sign: "Victuals and Tea" to order a glass of punch, when he suddenly noticed at the other end of the bridge a police superintendent, of

imposing appearance, with mutton-chop whiskers, a tricorn hat and a sword. He froze in his tracks; meanwhile the police superintendent cocked his finger at him and said: "Step over here, my good man!"

Ivan Yakovlevich, knowing the correct procedure in such circumstances, took off his cap while still a good way off and, stepping up briskly, said: "Very good day to you, Your Honour!"

"No, no, my friend, never mind the 'your Honour', but tell me now, what were you doing over there on the bridge, eh?"

"Honest to God, Sir, I was on my way to see a customer, and I thought I'd have a look at how quickly the river was flowing."

"You're lying! Don't think you'll get away with that. Let's hear the truth then!"

"I would be happy to shave your Honour twice a week, or even three times, without a murmur," answered Ivan Yakovlevich.

"No, my friend, that's not good enough. I already have three barbers to shave me, and they all regard it as a great honour. But now let's hear what you were up to?"

Ivan Yakovlevich blanched... But at this point proceedings become enshrouded in fog, and we know absolutely nothing of what ensued.

II

Collegiate Assessor Kovalev awoke fairly early and breathed out: "brrr!..." as he always did on awakening, for no reason apparent even to himself. He stretched and called for the small mirror which stood on the dressing table. He wanted to have a look at the pimple which had appeared on his nose the previous night; but to his greatest astonishment he saw that where his nose should have been there was a flat space! Taking fright, he asked for some water and rubbed his eyes with a towel: it was true, there was no nose! He pinched himself, to make sure he was not still asleep.But it seemed he was not asleep. Collegiate Assessor Kovalev leapt from his bed, and shook himself: no nose!.. He at once called for his clothes and dashed off in the direction of the Police Commissioner's office.

But in the meantime we must acquaint the reader with Kovalev, so that he can see for himself what sort of man our collegiate assessor was. The collegiate assessors who receive this rank with the help of various academic certificates, are not on any account to be compared with those collegiate assessors who acquire their position in the Caucasus. These are two completely different species. Learned collegiate assessors... But Russia is such an extraordinary place that if you say something about one collegiate assessor all its collegiate assessors, from Riga to Kamchatka, are sure to take it personally. The same holds true for all ranks and offices.—Kovalev was a Caucasian collegiate assessor. He had only held this rank for two years, and was thus still quite besotted with his newfound dignity; to give himself even greater weight and authority he always called himself major, rather than collegiate assessor. "Listen, my good woman," he would say, upon meeting a shirt-vendor on the street, "come along to my place: my flat's in Sadovaya street; ask anyone where Major Kovalev lives and they'll show you." And if he should espy a particularly comely wench he would give her an additional secret commission, saying: "you just ask, my poppet, for Major Kovalev's apartment."—For this reason henceforward we too shall call our collegiate assessor major.

Major Kovalev was in the habit of taking a daily stroll along Nevsky Prospekt. The collar of his shirt was always snow-white and starched. His whiskers were of the sort which can still be seen on the cheeks of provincial surveyors, architects, regimental doctors, policemen of one sort and another, and, in general, all gentlemen endowed with full, ruddy cheecks and an aptitude for boston: these whiskers extend to the very middle of the cheek and thence reach right to the nose. Major Kovalev had about him a number of cornelian seals, some with crests and others with the inscription: Wednesday, Thursday, Monday and so forth. The major had come to St. Petersburg with a specific purpose, namely, to seek a position appropriate to his station. If he succeeded this would be at vice-governor level, if not he would settle for an administratorship in some important department. Neither was Major Kovalev opposed to the idea of marrying; but only on condition that his bride should possess a capital of two hundred thousand. So the reader can now judge for himself the

worthy major's state of mind when he described, instead of a not unpresentable nose of moderate proportions, a ridiculous, empty, smooth space.

As ill luck would have it, not a single cab was to be seen on the street, and he was constrained to go on foot, wrapped in his cloack with a handkerchief covering his face, like someone with a nose-bleed. "But maybe I'm imagining it all: a nose can't disappear just like that." He went into a pastry-shop with the express object of looking into a mirror. Luckily there was no one in the shop: the waiters were sweeping out the rooms and arranging the chairs; some of them were bearing forth trays of hot pies; yesterday's coffee-stained newspapers lay about on the tables and chairs. "Well, thank God for that, there's no one here," he said, "now I can take a look." He approached the mirror timidly and looked in: "What a confounded nuisance!" he exclaimed, spitting... "If only there was something in the nose's place, but to be left with nothing!.."

Biting his lips with annoyance he left the pastry-shop and resolved to depart from his custom and not look or smile at anyone. Suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks by a doorway, as a most incredible phenomenon unfolded before his eyes: a carriage stopped at the entrance; the doors opened; stooping, a uniformed official sprang out and ran up the stairs. Imagine Kovalev's horror and amazement when he recognized this person as his very own nose! This extraordinary spectacle left him reeling with astonishment, and he was barely able to retain his footing; but he resolvéd at all costs to await the nose's return to his carriage and remained there trembling as if in a fever. Sure enough, two minutes later the nose emerged. He wore a gold-braided uniform, with a high stiff collar; he had on buckskin breeches, and a sword hung by his side. From his plumed hat it was apparent that he pretended to the rank of state councillor. It was also clear from his demeanour that he was on his way to pay a call. He glanced around, summoned the coachman: "Over here!", climbed in and they gallopped off.

Poor Kovalev almost lost his mind. He did not know what to make of this most extraordinary occurrence. And indeed, how could you explain the fact that a nose, which the previous day had still been attached to his face, unable to ride or walk,

was now wearing a uniform! He set off in pursuit of the carriage, which, fortunately, did not go far before stopping before the Kazan Cathedral.

He hastened into the cathedral, pushed his way through the row of old beggarwomen with their faces swathed in rags, leaving only two slits for the eyes, a sight which before had always caused him mirth, and entered the church. There were not many worshippers inside, and they were all clustered around the entrance. Kovalev was so distraught that he was quite unable to pray, and he eagerly scanned the church hoping for a glimpse of the uniformed gentleman. At last he saw him standing to one side. The nose had entirely concealed his face in his tall stiff collar, and was praying with an expression of utmost piety.

"How can I approach him?" thought Kovalev. "To judge by his uniform and hat he must be a state councillor. Deuce knows what I'm to do!"

He gave a cough as he drew near to him, but the nose undeterred, maintained his sanctimonious position, describing deep bows towards the altar.

"My good sir..." said Kovalev, desperately plucking up the courage: "my good sir..."

"What is it?" asked the nose, looking round.

"I am surprised, sir ... I do think ... you should know your place. And just look where I've found you—in a church. You must agree..."

"Excuse me, but I find myself unable to make head or tail of what you are saying. Please explain yourself."

"How can I explain?" thought Kovalev, and once again steeling himself, began: "Of course I ... actually I'm a major. And, I'm sure you agree, for me to walk around without a nose is a rather unseemly. It would be all right for some marketwoman, selling peeled oranges on the Voskresensky bridge to sit there with no nose; but as I'm hoping for a promotion ... and moreover being acquainted with the ladies of a number of distinguished houses: with State Councillor Chekhtaryov's wife, and others... Judge for yourself... I don't quite know how to put it, sir..." (Upon which Major Kovalev shrugged his shoulders.) "Forgive me, but if you look at this strictly from the point of view of duty and honour... you must surely agree..."

"Don't understand a thing," answered the nose. "Be so good as to make yourself clear."

"My good sir..." said Kovalev in a dignified tone; "As a matter of fact I find your words hard to comprehend... It all seems quite plain to me... Or do you wish... The point is, you're my very own nose!"

The nose looked at the major and set its features in a slight frown.

"You are mistaken, my good sir. I am a person in my own right. Furthermore there cannot be any close relations between us, for to judge by the buttons on your uniform you must serve in another department." Having said this the nose turned away and continued praying.

Kovalev was now at a complete loss what to do and even what to think. Just then he heard the pleasant rustle of a lady's dress: an elderly lady walked up, festooned in a mass of lace, and accompanied by a slim creature, clad in a white dress which excellently suited her slender frame, and a pale yellow hat, as light as puff-pastry. Behind them stood a tall footman with large whiskers and a good dozen collars who proceeded to open a snuff-box.

Kovalev moved a little closer, hitched up the cambric collar of his shirt, adjusted the seals on his gold watch-chain, and, smiling to right and left, directed his attention to the slender lady, who was inclined slightly forward like a flower in the spring as she raised the almost transparent fingers of her lily-white hand to her brow. Kovalev's smile widened when beneath her hat he espied a round, creamy chin and a portion of her cheek, brushed with the colour of the first rose of spring. But suddenly he recoiled as if scalded. He had remembered that in place of a nose he had absolutely nothing, and tears issued from his eyes. He swung round in order to tell the uniformed gentleman in so many words that he was simply pretending to be a state councillor, that he was an impostor and a scoundrel and that he was no more or less than his very own nose... But the nose had vanished: in the interval it had beaten a retreat, no doubt on its way to pay another call.

This plunged Kovalev into despair. He went out and stopped for a moment beneath the colonnade, peering all around him in the hope of spotting the nose. He remembered distinctly that he had been wearing a hat with a plume and a

gold-braided uniform; but he had not noticed his overcoat, nor the colour of his carriage, nor his horses, nor even whether he had had a footman, and if so in what livery. Moreover there was such a multitude of carriages pressing to and fro and at such a speed that he could not distinguish one from the other, and in any case he would have been powerless to stop any of them. It was a splendid sunny day. There were crowds of people on Nevsky; and the pavements overflowed with a floral cascade of ladies all the way from the Politseisky bridge to the Anichkov bridge. Over there was an acquaintance, an aulic councillor, whom he addressed as lieutenant colonel, especially in front of strangers. Here he saw Yarygin, head of a department in the Senate, a great friend, who always used to render forfeit at boston when he played an eight. Nearby another major, who had also gained his assessorship in the Caucasus, beckoned to him...

"Deuce take it!" said Kovalev. "Hey, cabbie, take me straight to the Police Commissioner's!"

Kovalev climbed into a droshky and sat there shouting at the cabbie: "Double quick time, now!"

"Is the commissioner at home?" he shouted, looking into the vestibule.

"'Fraid not," answered the porter, "just gone out this moment."

"Confound it!"

"Yes," continued the porter, "it weren't all that long ago, but he's gone. A minute or so earlier and you'd have caught him in."

Kovalev, keeping his handkerchief to his face the whole time, climbed back into his droshky and called out in a despairing voice: "Drive on!"

"Where?" asked the cabbie.

"Straight ahead!"

"How can I? There's a fork: left or right?"

This question forced Kovalev to stop and think. In his position it would be best to turn to the Board of Public Order, not because it was directly connected with the police, but because it got things done far more quickly than did the other authorities; to seek satisfaction from the authorities in the very place where the nose claimed to serve would obviously be imprudent. It was apparent from the nose's own statements that this

creature held nothing sacred and would be just as likely to lie now as it had lied before when claiming never to have set eyes on Major Kovalev. Kovalev was on the point of ordering the cabbie to proceed to the Board of Public Order when another thought struck him, namely, that this rogue and swindler, who at their very first encounter had behaved in such an unscrupulous manner, might by now have made good his escape from town. In this case all attempts to find him would either be completely futile or else might go on, which God forbid, for an entire month. Finally it was as though he received guidance from above. He decided to make straight for the newspaper office and quickly place an advertisement giving a detailed description of all its attributes, so that anyone who saw it might recover it for him, or at least inform him of its whereabouts. Having reached this decision, he ordered the cabbie to head for the newspaper office, and rained blows on his back the whole way, shouting: "Faster, you rogue! Faster, you blackguard!"—"Ouch, sir!" grunted the cabbie, shaking his head and flicking the reins of his horse, which had a coat as shaggy as a poodle's. At long last the droshky stopped, and Kovalev ran panting into the small reception room where a grey-haired bespectacled clerk in an old tail-coat, sat behind a desk and, holding his quill pen in his teeth, counted a pile of copper coins that had been put before him.

"Who takes advertisements here?" shouted Kovalev. "Ah—goodday!"

"Morning," said the grey-haired clerk raising his eyes for a moment and then lowering them again to his neat piles of money.

"I would like to print..."

"Just a moment. If you wouldn't mind waiting," said the clerk, writing a number down with his right hand, while moving two counters on an abacus with his left. A footman in a galloon-trimmed coat and with an appearance eloquent of his position in an aristocratic house, stood beside the desk holding a note, and feeling it incumbent upon himself to display a certain bonhomie, volunteered: "Believe me, sir, the horrible little dog isn't worth eighty kopecks, as for myself I wouldn't give you a brass button for it; but the countess loves it, loves it something terrible, and so she's offering one hundred rubles for whoever as finds it. If you want to know my

honest opinion, just between you and me, there's no accounting for people's tastes: now take your hunter, he won't mind paying five hundred, even a thousand for a pointer or a retriever, but then he's paying for a good dog."

The worthy clerk listened gravely to this discourse and at the same time continued his calculations, counting the number of letters in the notice he had been brought. Around him hovered a great number of old women, shop assistants and doormen with notes. One sought employment for a coachman of sober habits; another advertised for sale a little-used trap, brought in 1814 from Paris; elsewhere a position was required for a serf-girl trained as a laundress, but suitable for other work; buyers were sought for a sturdy droshky, missing one spring, a young spirited horse with grey dappled markings, a mere seventeen years of age, new turnip and radish seeds imported from London, a country cottage with a large plot: stabling for two horses, a site in which an excellent birch or fir grove could be planted; another notice drew the attention of all those anxious to purchase old boot soles, inviting them to come to the auction rooms any day, between 8 a. m. and 3 p. m. The room in which this company was assembled was of small proportions and the air in it was extraordinarily dense; but Collegiate Assessor Kovalev was unconscious of the atmosphere because he kept his handkerchief to his face and anyway his nose itself was at that moment God knows where.

"My good sir, really, you must... It's very important," he brought out impatiently.

"One moment! Two rubles forty three kopecks! Right away! One ruble sixty four kopecks!" commanded the grey-haired clerk, tossing pieces of paper in the faces of the old women and doormen. "What do you want?" he said at last, turning to Kovalev.

"I'd like to..." said Kovalev, "a vile act of treachery has been committed, I still can't make it out. I want you to print that the person who brings this rogue to me will be handsomely rewarded."

"Could I please have your name?"

"No, why should you need my name? I can't divulge it. I have a lot of acquaintances: State Councillor Chekhtarev's wife, Palageya Grigoryevna Podtochina, wife of a staff officer... They might see it, God forbid! You could simply write: a

collegiate assessor, or, better still, a gentleman of the rank of major."

"And the person who has escaped was one of your serfs?"

"What, one of my serfs? Oh no, far worse than that! It's my ... er—nose that's run away..."

"Hm! what a singular surname. And did this Mr. Nose swindle you out of a large sum?"

"No, nose, not ... you've got it wrong! My nose, my very own nose, has gone and disappeared. It's playing some devilish trick on me!"

"But in what manner did it disappear? I'm afraid I can't quite follow all this."

"Well I don't know myself; but the main thing is that it is now driving about the city passing itself off as a state councillor. So I am asking you to place an announcement requesting that woever catches it bring it to me forthwith and without the slightest delay. Judge for yourself: how can I go on without such a prominent part of my anatomy?—it's not as if I'd lost a little toe, and could quickly slip my foot into my boot before anyone saw that it was missing. On Thursdays I call on State Councillor Chekhtarev's wife; Palageya Grigoryevna Podtochina is the wife of a staff officer and she has a very pretty daughter, and they are both very good friends of mine, so you can see for yourself what a predicament I am in... I simply cannot show myself to them now."

The clerk was pensive for a moment, as was apparent from his tightly pursed lips.

"No, I can't print such an announcement in the paper," he said finally, after a long silence.

"What? Why not?"

"I can't. The newspaper could lose its reputation. If everyone were to start writing that their noses had run away, just imagine... As it is people are saying that the paper publishes a lot of nonsense and false rumours."

"But what's nonsense about this? It's all as clear as daylight."

"That's how it seems to you. But take the following case last week. An official came in just as you have today with a note, which came to 2 rubles 73 kopecks, and all the announcement said was that a black-haired poodle had run away. On the face of it, nothing out of the ordinary. But it all

ended in a libel suit, because this poodle was the cashier of some institution, I don't remember which."

"But I'm not making any announcement about a poodle, this is about my very own nose, which amounts to practically the same thing as myself."

"Sorry, I can't place such an announcement."

"Even when I really have lost my nose!"

"If that's so then it's a job for the doctors. They say that there are people who can fit you out with any nose you like. But anyway I observe that you are something of a wag and fond of practical jokes."

"I swear to you, by all that's holy! Since things have come to this pass, I'll show you!"

"Why bother!" continued the clerk, taking a pinch of snuff. "Actually, if it's not too much trouble," he added looking up in curiosity, "perhaps I might take a look."

Collegiate Assessor Kovalev removed the handkerchief from his face.

"Well, that is most extraordinary!" said the clerk: "The area is completely smooth, like a freshly cooked pancake. Extraordinarily smooth, in fact!"

"Now I hope that's put paid to your objections! You can see for yourself that the announcement has to go in. I will be extremely grateful to you, and I am very glad that this incident has brought me the pleasure of your acquaintance..." The major, as we can see, had decided at this point to try a little fawning.

"Printing it would, of course, be a simple matter," said the clerk: "only I don't see what good this can do you. If you're determined to do something about it then find someone with a flair for words, get him to write it up as a rare occurrence of nature and publish this article in the *Northern Bee*" (here he took another pinch of snuff) "for the edification of our young people" (here he wiped his nose) "or indeed for the interest of the general public."

This suggestion was the final blow. Collegiate Assessor Kovalev lowered his eyes to the newspaper where they alighted on the theatre column; his face was on the point of smiling as he caught the name of an attractive young actress, and his hand reached for his pocket to see whether he had on him a five-ruble note, for staff officers, in Kovalev's opinion, must

only have seats in the stalls—but then he remembered about his nose and his heart sank!

Even the clerk, it seemed, was moved by Kovalev's plight. Wishing to offer some measure of consolation he regarded it as fitting to express his sympathy in a few words: "I am indeed most grieved that you have been the victim of such a droll accident. Perhaps you would care for a pinch of snuff? it gives relief from headaches and bucks up the spirits; it even has a beneficial effect on haemorrhoids."

Whereupon the clerk offered Kovalev his snuff-box, adroitly folding beneath it its lid which displayed a portrait of a lady in a hat.

This thoughtless gesture was more than Kovalev's patience could stand. "I do not understand how you can think this a joking matter," he said heatedly: "surely you can see that I do not in fact have the wherewithal to partake of snuff? Devil take your snuff! I cannot bear to look at the staff, not even the best brand, to say nothing of that Berezinsky shag." On saying this he stalked out of the newspaper office in high dudgeon and set off to see the superintendent of police, a great lover of sugar. His entire front room, which was also his dining-room, was devoted to an exhibition of loaves of sugar, which shopkeepers brought him as a token of friendship. At this moment his cook was engaged in removing from the superintendent his jack-boots; his sword and all his military paraphernalia were already hanging peacefully in the corners of the room and his three-year-old son was playing with his father's awe-inspiring tricorn hat, while the warrior himself, after his day in the throes of battle, prepared to savour the delights of peace.

Kovalev was ushered in to him at the very moment when, after a good stretch and grunt, he announced: "Ahhh, how for a cracking two hour nap!" Thus we can see that the collegiate assessor had timed his arrival extremely badly. And I suspect that even if he had brought with him a few pounds of tea or a roll of cloth he still would not have received a particularly effusive welcome. The superintendent was a great champion of both the arts and commerce in all their forms: but most of all he favoured the state bank-note. "Now that's what I like," he was wont to say: "you can't beat one of these: it doesn't need feeding, takes up little space, there's always room for it in the pocket, and if you drop it it won't break."

The superintendent received Kovalev rather coldly and remarked that after dinner is not the time to carry out an investigation, that nature itself has ordained that after eating our fill we should rest a little (from which the collegiate assessor could see that the police superintendent was familiar with the utterances of the ancient sages), that a respectable person will not be thus rudely parted from his nose and that there were majors and majors in this world, some of whom do not even have a decent shirt to their name and frequent the most disreputable places.

This, alas, was Kovalev's Achilles' heel! We should note that the collegiate assessor was an extremely touchy person. He could forgive anything that was said about his person but not disrespect for his rank or post. He even argued that in theatrical performances you could permit any references to subalterns, but remarks about field officers were definitely not on. The superintendent's reception so took him aback that he shook his head and pronounced in a dignified tone, holding out his arms: "I regret that after such offensive remarks on your part I am unable to make any further comment..." and departed.

He returned home, barely able to hold himself on his feet. Dusk had already fallen. After all this long, futile search his flat struck him as forlorn and totally uninviting. When he entered the hall he saw his footman Ivan lying on the grubby leather couch aiming gobs of spit at a point on the ceiling, a target which he hit with some measure of success. The man's torpor enraged the collegiate assessor; whacking him over the head with his hat, he shouted: "You're always loafing about, you swine!"

Ivan at once sprang to his feet and flew to his master's side to help him off with his cloak.

On entering his room the major sank exhausted and mournful into an armchair and after heaving a few sighs said at last:

"My God, O my God! What have I done to deserve this? If only I had lost an arm or a leg—it would have been far better; or even my ears—that would have been hard, but at least bearable; but without his nose a man is nothing: neither man nor beast, but God knows what! just some rubbish to be thrown out of the window! And even if I'd lost it in the war or

in a duel, or if I had lost it through some fault of my own; but it disappeared without rhyme or reason, just like that. But no, it can't be," he added after a moment's thought. "It's most unlikely that a nose should disappear; totally improbable. I'm either dreaming it, or imagining it; perhaps instead of water I drank the vodka which I use to rub my skin after shaving. That fool Ivan didn't clear it away, and I must have picked it up."

To make absolutely sure that he wasn't drunk the major pinched himself so painfully that he even cried out. This pain convinced him that he was quite fully awake. He stole up to the mirror screwing his eyes up in the hope that his nose would reappear in its rightful place; but on seeing his reflection he leapt back, exclaiming, "What a ridiculous sight!"

It really was quite incomprehensible. This was not like losing a button, a silver spoon, a watch or something of that sort;—but to lose his own nose, and moreover in his own flat!... Major Kovalev pondered over all the circumstances, and decided that the most likely culprit behind it all was none other than staff officer Podtochin's wife, who wished him to marry her daughter. He did in fact enjoy flirting with the girl, but carefully avoided any definite commitment. When the staff officer's wife announced in so many words that she wished to marry her daughter to him he had cautiously extricated himself with a shower of compliments, saying that he was still too young, that he would have to serve another five years, until he attained the right age of forty-two. And so the staff officer's wife, clearly out of a desire for revenge, had decided to ruin him and hired for this purpose the services of witches, because it was quite inconceivable that his nose had been cut off: no one had entered his room; his barber Ivan Yakovlevich had last shaved him on Wednesday and throughout all Wednesday and even all of Thursday his nose had been intact,—this he remembered and was perfectly convinced of; moreover he would have felt the pain, and there was no question of the wound healing so quickly and become as smooth as a pancake. He started making plans: should he take the staff officer's wife to court through official channels or go to see her and accuse her to her face. These reflections were interrupted by the light which appeared through the chinks of the door, and informed him that Ivan had already lit the candle in the front room.

Soon Ivan himself appeared, bearing the candle before him and lighting up the entire room. Kovalev's first reaction was to seize his handkerchief and cover that empty space which only the day before had contained a nose, so that his idiot manservant would not stand there gawping.

No sooner had Ivan come into the room than a strange voice could be heard in the hall enquiring: "Is this the residence of Collegiate Assessor Kovalev?"

"Come in. Major Kovalev at your service," said Kovalev, leaping to his feet and opening the door.

Through it came a police constable of smart appearance, with whiskers neither a shade too light nor too dark and fairly full cheeks—the very same official whom we met at the beginning of the story on the Isakievsky bridge.

"Am I right in thinking that Your Honour has lost his nose?"

"You are."

"It has now been located."

"What do you say?" shouted Major Kovalev. Then, speechless with joy, he stared pop-eyed at the police constable standing before him, whose full lips and cheeks seemed to dance in the bright light of the candle. "How did you find it?"

"By pure chance: he was just about to flee when we intercepted him. He had already mounted the stage-coach and was bound for Riga. His passport was an old one in the name of some official. Another strange thing is that at first I took him for a person. But luckily I had my glasses with me, and saw at once that he was a nose. You see, I'm short-sighted, and if you were to stand right in front of me I would only see that you had a face, but I would be unable to make out anything like a nose, or beard. My mother-in-law, the wife's mother, that is, can't see anything either."

Kovalev was beside himself with excitement. "But where is it? Where? I'll go along at once."

"No need to bother. Knowing that you'd be needing it I brought it along with me. And the strange thing is that the main culprit in this business is that rogue of a barber on Voznesenskaya Street, who is at present sitting in the police station. I've had my suspicions of him for a long time for drunkenness and theft, and only two days ago he swiped a big button-card from a stall. Your nose is exactly as it left

you."—On saying this the constable put his hand in his pocket and took out a nose wrapped in paper.

"That's it!" exclaimed Kovalev. "The very one! Won't you join me in a cup of tea today?"

"Greatly honoured, but I'm afraid I can't: I have to go on from here to the penitentiary... Terrible the way prices are going up... The mother-in-law lives with us—that is, the wife's mother, and then there're the children; the oldest one is particularly promising: such a bright lad, but we haven't a brass kopeck for his education."

Kovalev at once knew what he was getting at, and taking up a 10-ruble note from his desk pressed it into the constable's hand; the latter went out through the door with a low bow, and the very next moment Kovalev could hear him on the street outside, delivering a physical admonition to some stupid peasant who had ridden his cart right onto the pavement.

On the departure of the constable the collegiate assessor sat in a stupor for a few moments, so overwhelmed by this sudden stroke of good fortune that it took him quite some time to regain awareness of his surroundings. Finally, he gingerly took up the recovered nose in his cupped hands and once again examined it closely.

"It's it, the very one!" he said. "There's the pimple on the left which popped up yesterday." The major all but laughed for joy.

But nothing lasts long in this life, and in the second minute our raptures of joy are never as intense as in the first; by the third minute they subside altogether and our soul returns to its usual state, just as a ripple created by a falling stone eventually merges with the smooth surface of the water around it. Kovalev began to ponder and realised that the affair was not yet resolved: the nose had been found, but it still had to be stuck on, returned to its proper place.

"And what if it won't stick?"

As he posed this question to himself, the major blanched.

He dashed across to the dressing table in a panic and pulled the mirror closer, to be sure that he stuck the nose on straight. His hands trembled as, with minute care, he placed it in its former position. Horrors! The nose would not stick!.. He held it to his mouth, warmed it a little with his breath, and once again placed it on the smooth expanse between his two

cheeks; but the nose would not stay in place for a moment.

"Now, you... Stay put, you fool!" he commanded it. But the nose was as stiff as wood and fell to the table with a strange noise, as if it were made of cork. The major's face twitched convulsively. "Surely it will stick," he said in fright. But however many times he set it in its place, all his efforts were in vain.

He called Ivan and sent him for the doctor, who lived in the same building, renting the best flat on the first floor. This doctor was a distinguished-looking man, with splendid coal-black whiskers, and a bonny, blooming wife; he ate fresh apples in the morning and kept his mouth remarkably clean, gargling for almost three quarters of an hour every morning and polishing his teeth with five different kinds of toothbrush. The doctor appeared immediately. Having asked how long ago the misfortune occurred, he lifted Major Kovalev's head by the chin and thrust his thumb so hard into that part of his face which had previously housed a nose that the Major recoiled and banged his head against the wall. This, the doctor said, was nothing, and advised him to move away from the wall. Thereupon he bade him incline his head first to the right, and after feeling the place where the nose had been, said "Hm!" Then he told him to incline his head to the left and, with another "Hm!" gave him another prod with his thumb, causing Major Kovalev to toss his head like a horse having its teeth examined. After this test the doctor shook his head and said: "No, it cannot be done. You would be better advised to leave it as it is, or you might make it worse. It could of course be stuck on, and I could do it right now; but I assure you that it would only be worse for you."

"Now that's capital! and how am I to go on without a nose?" protested Kovalev. "It can't be any worse than it is now. The devil only knows what this is! Where can I show my face in such a preposterous state? I move in the best circles, and even tonight I'm expected at two houses. I have many acquaintances: state councillor Chekhtarev's wife, Podtochina, the wife of a staff officer ... although after this exploit of hers I shall have nothing more to do with her other than through the police. I implore you," he pleaded: "can it not be done? stick it on any old way; even if it's not very secure, just so long as it stays on; I could even prop it up with my hand at dangerous

moments. I should add that I never dance, and so won't knock it off with any careless movement. You may be assured that I shall certainly express my gratitude for your visit, within the limits of my means..."

"Believe me," said the doctor in a voice neither loud nor quiet but extraordinarily compelling and magnetic: "that I never treat people out of a desire for personal gain. This is contrary to my code and my art. I do admittedly accept a fee for visits, but only in order not to offend my patients by my refusal. Of course, I could stick on your nose, but I assure you on my honour, in case you don't trust my word, that the result will be far worse. You would do better to trust to the action of nature. Wash often with cold water, and I can assure you that without a nose you will be just as healthy as if you did have one. And I advise you to preserve the nose in a jar of spirit, or better still to add two table spoons of pepper vodka and warm vinegar—and then you'll be able to get a reasonable price for it. I'll even take it myself, if your price isn't too steep."

"No, no! I shan't sell it for any price!" shouted Major Kovalev in despair: "I'd sooner it rotted away!"

"So sorry," said the doctor, bowing, "I only wanted to be of service... Well, there we are then! At any rate, you can't say I haven't tried."

On saying this the doctor stalked out of the room with a dignified air. Kovalev had not even looked at his face, and in his trance-like state had only noticed the cuffs of his shirt, as white and pure as driven snow, peeking forth from the sleeves of his black tail-coat.

The very next day he decided, before lodging an official complaint, to write to the staff officer's wife, asking whether she would not agree amicably to return to him what rightfully was his. The letter read as follows:

"Dear Madame Alexandra Grigorievna,

"I find myself unable to understand the strangeness of your behaviour. You may be assured that by acting in this manner you stand to gain nothing and in no way will force me to marry your daughter. Believe me, I am perfectly well aware of the whole business behind my nose as well as that you and no one else are the main protagonist in this affair. Its sudden separation from its proper place, its flight and disguise, first as a government official, then as itself, are no

more nor less than the results of sorcerous actions performed by yourself or those engaged in similarly refined pursuits. For my part I regard it incumbent upon me to warn you that if today my above-mentioned nose is not back in its proper place I shall be forced to have recourse to the patronage and protection of the law.

"Nonetheless with my utmost respect, I have the honour to be

"your humble servant

"Platon Kovalev".

"My Dear Platon Kuzmich,

"I was most astounded by your letter. In all frankness there was something quite unexpected, particularly with regard to the undeserved reproaches on your part. I can assure you that I have never received in my house the official you mention, neither in disguise, nor in his real aspect. Admittedly Philipp Ivanovich Potanchikov has paid calls on us. And while it is true that he did seek the hand of my daughter, and is himself of a fine, sober disposition and a man of great learning, I have never given him any encouragement whatever. You also make mention of a nose. If by this you mean to say that I am, as it were, turning up my nose at you, that is, rejecting you out of hand: then I am surprised that you yourself should bring this up, since I, as you are aware, was of a directly contrary opinion, and if you were now to seek the hand of my daughter in the legitimate way I would be prepared forthwith to agree to your request, for this has always been the object of my most earnest desire, in the hope of which I am eternally at your service

"Alexandra Podtochina."

"No," said Kovalev, putting down the letter. "She is definitely not guilty. She can't be! No one guilty of a crime could have written such a letter!" The collegiate assessor was knowledgeable about these matters because a few times while serving in the Caucasus he had conducted prosecutions. "How on earth did this all happen? The devil only knows!" he exclaimed at last, dropping his hands.

Meanwhile rumours about this extraordinary occurrence were circulating around the capital, and, as is usual, not

without certain embellishments. At that time people's minds were particularly receptive to all manner of extraordinary phenomena: shortly before this the entire city had been preoccupied with experiments with magnetism. In addition a story had recently done the rounds about dancing chairs in Konyushenny Street, thus it was hardly surprising that before long rumour had Assessor Kovalev's nose taking a daily stroll along Nevsky Prospekt at 3 o'clock sharp. Every day a large crowd of inquisitive on-lookers would gather. Someone said that the nose had been seen at Junker's store, and such a crush of people collected around the shop that the police had to be called in. One entrepreneur, of respectable appearance, complete with whiskers, who sold various dried confections at the entrance to the theatre, specially made some fine, sturdy benches on which he invited inquisitive members of the public to stand for a fee of 80 kopecks per person. A certain distinguished colonel made a specially early start from home and forced his way through the crowd with great difficulty; but, to his great annoyance, in the shop window he saw, not a nose, but an ordinary woollen jersey and a lithograph depicting a girl adjusting her stocking whilst being observed from behind a tree by a dandy wearing a cut-away waist-coat and a goatee beard—a picture which had hung in the same spot for more than ten years. Stalking off he announced huffily: "How can people be allowed to spread such ridiculous and far-fetched rumours?"

Then a rumour sprang up that Major Kovalev's nose took its walk not on Nevsky Prospekt but in the Tavrichesky Gardens, and that it had done so for a long time; and that when Persian envoy Khozrev Mirza had lived there he had been most amazed by this strange freak of nature. Some of the students from the Surgical Academy set off for this spot. A certain respected lady of noble extraction wrote a special letter to the warden of the park asking him to show her children this rare phenomenon, and, if possible, to provide an edifying and admonitory elucidation for the young people's benefit.

All those habitués of receptions and other socialites who so love to amuse the ladies, were extremely pleased about these happenings, as their resources of entertainment had been totally exhausted. A small number of respectable and law-abiding citizens were extremely displeased. One gentleman

announced with annoyance that he failed to understand how in the present enlightened age such ridiculous fictions could gain currency, and that he was surprised that the government were not attending to the matter. This gentleman clearly belonged to that class of citizenry who would like to involve the government in everything, even their everyday quarrels with their wives. After this ... but at this point the incident is enshrouded in a mist, and what ensued is totally unknown.

III

The most absurd things happen in life. Sometimes they defy all the laws of verisimilitude: one day the very same nose which had been riding around with the rank of State Councillor and which created such a stir in the city reappeared, as if nothing had happened: in its rightful place, i. e. midway between Major Kovalev's two cheeks. This took place on April the 7th. Waking up and accidentally glimpsing himself in the mirror what did he see but—a nose! He seized hold of it—yes, his nose! "Yippee!" exclaimed Kovalev, and in his delight would have danced a Cossack trepak barefoot in the room had he not been put off by Ivan's entry. He at once called for his washing things, and on washing himself took another look in the mirror: there was the nose. Wiping himself with a towel he took yet another look: there it was, his nose!

"Ahem, Ivan, would you have a look, I think I have a pimple on my nose," he said, thinking to himself: what if Ivan says: "Why no, sir, not only no pimple, but no nose either!"

But Ivan said: "No, no pimple, your nose is as clean as a whistle!"

"Jolly good show!" said the Major to himself and clicked his fingers. At this moment the barber Ivan Yakovlevich peeked round the door, but as timidly as a cat which has just been thrashed for stealing the bacon.

"Tell me first are your hands clean?" shouted Kovalev while he was still some way off.

"They are."

"Liar!"

"I swear they're clean, sir."

"Well, they'd better be."

Kovalev sat down. Ivan Yakovlevich swathed him in a

towel and in a single instant, with the aid of a brush, transformed his entire beard and part of his cheeks into a mass of whipped cream, such as is served at birthday parties in merchants' households. "Well I never!" exclaimed Ivan Yakovlevich to himself on seeing the nose, and then twisted his head round and looked at the nose from the side: "Look at that! Who would have thought it!" he continued, gazing at length at the nose. Finally with a movement as gentle and cautious as one could imagine he raised two fingers preparing to seize it by its tip. Such was Ivan Yakovlevich's system.

"Now now, careful!" shouted Kovalev. At this Ivan Yakovlevich dropped his hand frightened and non-plussed as never before in his life. Finally he started scratching gingerly away with the razor beneath the major's chin, and although he did not find it at all easy or convenient to shave without holding onto his client's olfactory organ, he nevertheless managed, by somehow propping his rough thumb against the major's cheek and lower gum to overcome all the obstacles and accomplished the act of shaving him.

When the operation had been completed, Kovalev made haste to dress, called a cab and drove straight to the pastry shop. While still in the doorway he shouted: "Waiter, a cup of chocolate!" and the very same moment repaired to the mirror: there was the nose. He jauntily turned round and narrowing his eyes, cast a satirical glance at two officers, one of whom had a nose no bigger than a waistcoat button. After this he made for the office of the department in which he was negotiating for the post of vice-governor, or, failing that, an administratorship. On his way through the reception room he glanced into the mirror: the nose was in place. Then he went to call upon another collegiate assessor, a fellow major, and a great satirist, to whose snide remarks he would usually answer: "Now now, go easy on the sting!" On the way he thought: "If the major doesn't split his sides laughing on seeing me it will be a sure sign that everything is as it should be and in its proper place." But the collegiate assessor did not bat an eyelid. "Jolly good, damn it all!" thought Kovalev to himself. On the road he met Madame Podtochina with her daughter, bowed to them and was greeted with cries of delight: clearly his appearance had not been adversely affected. He spoke with them at great length, and made a point of bringing out his snuff-box, and

with great deliberation plugged his nose in both orifices, thinking all the while: "So much for you two, right pair of hens! And I shan't marry the daughter all the same. A spot of amour—by all means!" And from then onwards Major Kovalev went about his business as if nothing had ever happened, walking along Nevsky Prospekt, visiting the theatre, showing his face everywhere. And his nose, also as if nothing had ever happened, remained fixed to his face, and gave no sign of having ever been unstuck at all. After this Major Kovalev was forever in good mood, smiling away, doggedly pursuing all the pretty ladies and even once stopping at a stall in the Gostiny Dvor to buy a ribbon for a medal, although it is not sure why as he was not himself a knight of any order.

And such a thing happened in the northern capital of our vast country! Only now, when we ponder over the entire story, do we see that it contains much that is highly implausible. Leaving aside the strange, unnatural detachment of the nose and its appearance in various places in the guise of a state councillor—how could Kovalev fail to see that it is not done to place advertisements concerning missing noses in the newspaper? By which I do not mean that I regard newspaper advertisements as a pointless extravagance—that is nonsense, and I am in no way a tightfisted person. But it is indecent, improper, incorrect! And then again: how did the nose turn up in a freshly-baked loaf, and how in the first place did Ivan Yakovlevich?... No, I do not understand that, not a bit of it! But stranger still, and hardest of all to understand, is why authors should take such incidents as their subject-matter. I am forced to admit I find it quite incomprehensible, I just... no, I simply do not understand. Firstly, there is absolutely no benefit to the nation; secondly ... no, and there's no benefit secondly either. I simply do not know what it means...

But all the same, all things considered, we probably can concede this and that, and the odd thing here and there, and maybe even... I mean, strange things happen all the time, do they not? And you must admit, when you think about it, there is something in all this, isn't there? Whatever you might say, such things do happen, rarely perhaps, but they do.

1835-1842

THE PORTRAIT

PART I

You never saw such crowds anywhere as those in front of the picture stall on Shchukin Dvor. For this stall displayed the most varied collection of curiosities: the pictures were for the most part painted in oils, covered with dark green varnish and set in tawdry, dark-yellow frames. A winter scene with white trees, a bright red sunset, glowing like a fire, a Flemish peasant with a pipe and a crooked arm, looking more like a turkey-cock in shirt sleeves than a person—such was their usual subject matter. Of course there were the etchings as well: a portrait of Khozrev-Mirza in a sheepskin hat, portraits of generals in tricornes and with hooked noses. And finally the doors themselves on a shop like this are usually festooned with sheafs of those crude prints which bear witness to the remarkable native talents of the Russian. One portrayed the Tsarevna Miliktrisa Kirbityevna, another the city of Jerusalem, whose houses were unceremoniously daubed with red streaks, which also splashed across the ground and two praying Russian peasants in mittens. There are usually few buyers for these works of art, but no shortage of observers. You are sure to see some truant lackey gaping at them, as he balances the covered dishes that contain the dinner he is carrying from some inn to his unsuspecting master, who is shortly going to find himself sipping lukewarm soup. In front of him you will see a soldier in a greatcoat, a habitué of the flea-market, hawking two pen-knives; a market-wife from Okhty carrying a box full of shoes. Everyone reacts differently to what he sees:

the peasants usually point; the pedlars examine the wares seriously; the serving boys and shop apprentices giggle and teasingly compare one another to the caricatures; the old servants in their frieze greatcoats only look in order to sneak a quiet little yawn; while the young Russian market-wives hurry over, guided by their instinct, to listen to people's gossip and to see what they are looking at.

At the time our story opens the young artist Chartkov had involuntarily stopped at the stall on his way past. His ancient greatcoat and unfashionable clothes betrayed him as the sort of person who is so dedicated to his work that he has no time to attend to outward appearance, despite the mysterious attraction that apparel exercises over young people. He stopped before the stall and smiled inwardly at the hideous pictures on display. Then he found himself wondering: what sort of people could want these pictures? He found nothing surprising in the fact that the Russian populace should gaze at pictures of Yeruslan Lazarevich, or "He dined and drank aplenty", or Foma and Yerema: the subjects were simple and comprehensible to simple folk; but who was going to buy these gaudy, dirty daubings in oils? Who wanted these Flemish peasants, these red-and-blue landscapes, with their hollow pretensions to some higher level of art, which in acutal fact only succeeded in expressing its utter debasement? This, it appeared, was not the work of some self-taught child. Otherwise, the overall flatness and effect of caricature would have been partially redeemed by a youthful fervour. But here all one could see was obtusity, the stamp of ineffectual and flabby mediocrity, impudently styling itself art, when in actual fact its proper place was somewhere among the lower handicrafts, an inadequacy that, true to its nature, had degraded art itself to the level of a menial trade. All these pictures exhibited the same colours, the same style, the same stale hand, which seemed to belong more to a crude automaton then to a person!... He stood for a long time before these grubby paintings, and eventually his thoughts strayed elsewhere, while the stall owner, a nondescript little man in a frieze overcoat and with a beard dating back to at least the previous Sunday, was importuning him, bargaining and naming prices without even finding out what he liked or what he wanted. "Now for these fine peasants and this little landscape I'll settle for twenty-five.

Just look at the brushwork! They're a delight to the eye; fresh from the easel, the varnish is still wet. Or take this winter scene! a snip at fifteen rubles! The frame's worth that alone. A gorgeous winter scene!" On saying this the merchant lightly tapped the canvas, as if to demonstrate the quality of its winter. "Will you want them wrapped up and delivered to your home? Where should I have them sent? Hey, boy, bring some string." "Hold it, old man, not so fast," said the artist, coming to his senses and seeing that the enterprising shopkeeper had already started tying the pictures together. He felt slightly embarrassed at not buying anything, having spent so long in the shop, so he said: "Just wait a moment, I'll see if there's something I like here" and, bending down, picked up from the floor some battered and dusty old pictures that had been piled together, obviously regarded as worthless. There were old family portraits, whose proper descendants were perhaps no longer to be found in this world, completely blackened pictures with torn canvases, frames which had lost all their gilt, in a word, a heap of old rubbish. But the artist started sifting through them, thinking: "Maybe I'll come across something here." Many were the stories he had heard about people finding old masters amongst the junk of a bric-à-brac stall.

The proprietor, seeing where he had turned his attention, lost interest in him and, resuming his air of self-importance, returned to his post in the doorway from which he importuned passers-by, beckoning them into his shop:

"This way, good sir; come and look at the pictures! come on now, fresh from the easel." After shouting away in this manner to no avail for upwards of an hour and growing tired of talking to the rag dealer who stood opposite, also in the door of his shop, he finally remembered that he had a customer, and turning his back to the passing world he went inside. "Well, my good sir, found anything?" But for some time the artist had been standing motionless before a portrait in a large and once magnificent frame, which barely retained any trace of its gilt. It depicted an old man with emaciated, jaundiced features; his face appeared to have been captured at a moment of feverish agitation and was redolent of some southern strength. They bore the imprint of the fierce midday sun. He was draped in a capacious Asiatic costume. Despite its dusty, dilapidated state, Chartkov could see when he removed the

grime from the area of the face that the portrait was the work of a fine artist. It appeared to be unfinished; but the power of the author's brush was remarkable. The most unusual feature was the eyes: on them the artist had exercised all his zeal and considerable talent. They stared back at the observer with such lifelike intensity that they even destroyed all the harmony of the portrait. When he carried the portrait over to the doorway the eyes stared harder still. They had almost exactly the same effect on the public. A woman who had stopped behind him called out: "He's looking!" and recoiled. He had a strange feeling, something he himself could not explain and put the painting down on the ground.

"Well, are you going to take the portrait?" said the proprietor.

"How much?" said the artist.

"Well, I wouldn't want much for that now, would I? I'll let it go for seventy-five kopecks!"

"No."

"Well, what'll you give for it?"

"Twenty," said the artist, preparing to leave.

"Huh, call that money? you couldn't even get the frame for twenty kopecks. Are you planning to buy it tomorrow, then? Wait, sir, come back! Another ten kopecks and it's yours. All right, take it for twenty. It's only to make a start, to get my first customer." He gave a dismissive wave, as if to say: "Fancy my letting a picture go for twenty kopecks!"

In this way Chartkov quite unexpectedly bought the old portrait and found himself thinking as he did so: "Why did I buy it? what do I want it for?" But he couldn't get out of it now. He took twenty kopecks out of his pocket, handed it to the proprietor, tucked the portrait under his arm and set forth. On his way he remembered that the twenty kopecks he had paid out were his last. His mind suddenly clouded over, and a wave of annoyance combined with total apathy washed over him "To hell with it! It's a stinking life!" he said with the despondency of a Russian entering upon hard times. And he stepped on at a brisk and almost mechanical pace, oblivious to everything. The red glow of eventide still lingered across half the sky; the buildings facing this direction remained flushed with its warm hue, while the cold, bluish light of the moon gained in brightness. The semi-translucent evening shadows

cast by the buildings and passers-by lay across the ground in strips. The artist gazed at the sky with its shimmering, chimerical light and exclaimed, almost simultaneously: "what a subtle tone!" and "how deuced annoying!" And, adjusting the portrait, which kept slipping from his grip, he quickened his step.

Exhausted and drenched with sweat, he dragged himself back to his home in the Fifteenth Line on Vassilievsky Island. Gasping for breath he hauled himself up the filthy staircase covered with pools of slop and decorated with the leavings of cats and dogs. There was no answer to his knocking; no one at home. He leant against the window, patiently preparing for a long wait, when suddenly he heard behind him the footsteps of a blue-shirted lad, his combined manservant, model, paint-mixer and sweeper, who was in fact better at muddying the floors with his dirty boots than he was at sweeping them. The lad was called Nikita, and all the time his master was out he spent on the street. Nikita fumbled for a long time with the key before he could get it into the key-hole, practically invisible in the dark. Finally the door was opened. Chartkov stepped into his hall, which was unbearably cold as is every artist's home, cold being something artists are quite oblivious to. He did not bother to take off his coat and give it to Nikita, but went straight into his studio, a large square room with a low ceiling and frosted windows, full of all sorts of artist's rubbish: sections of plaster arms, prepared canvases, sketches begun and abandoned, cloth draped over the chairs. He felt a rush of fatigue, threw off his coat, stood the portrait, which he had by now almost forgotten, between two small canvases and collapsed onto the narrow divan, of which it could not truthfully be said that it was upholstered in leather, for the row of brass tacks which had once held it in place had long since been liberated from the leather covering. This latter lay unattached on top of the divan, enabling Nikita to stuff underneath it socks, shirts and other dirty laundry. After sitting briefly and then lying down for as long as was possible on such a narrow divan he finally asked for a candle.

"There ain't none," said Nikita.

"How come?"

"Well, there weren't any yesterday neither," said Nikita. The artist recalled that indeed there hadn't been any the day

before either, calmed down and fell silent. He let himself be undressed and put on his threadbare dressing-gown.

"And another thing, the landlord called," said Nikita.

"He came for the money, I know," commented the artist, with a shrug.

"And he didn't come on his own," said Nikita.

"Who with?"

"I don't know ... some policeman."

"What did the policeman want?"

"I don't know; he said something about the rent owing on the flat".

"And what'll they do next?"

"I don't know what they'll do next, but he said that if he don't want to pay, then he can clear out of the flat; they said they'd come again tomorrow, both of them."

"Let them come," said Chartkov with indifference and sank into a torpor.

Young Chartkov was a talented artist, who promised great things: his work sporadically demonstrated fine observation, perspicacity and an eagerness to get closer to nature. "Now listen, mon frère," his professor often used to say to him: "you have talent and it would be a shame for you to waste it. But you're impatient. You get an idea into your head, something takes your fancy and that's it: you have no time for anything else, it's all rubbish to you, and you don't even want to look at it. Take care that you don't turn into one of those fashionable painters. Your colours are already getting a bit clamorous. Your contours are not strict enough: sometimes they're so weak the line cannot be seen at all. You're too anxious to achieve fashionable lighting effects, to paint in an eye-catching way—if you're not careful you'll wind up painting in the English style. Take care: you're developing a leaning towards society; now and again I've seen you wearing a foppish scarf, a glossy hat... It's tempting, I know, and you could easily find yourself painting fashionable pictures and society portraits for remunerative fees. But this is the way to destroy your talent, not to develop it. Be patient. Think about each picture properly, and forget about stylish effects: let other people make money that way. You'll reap your reward in due time."

In some ways the professor was right. It is true that our artist occasionally longed to get himself spruced up and go out

on a binge—in other words, to give free rein to his young blood. But he was able to control these impulses. At times he could forget everything on picking up his brush, and would part company with it as someone rudely awakened in the middle of a wonderful dream. His taste had broadened. He had not yet grasped the full depth of Raphael, but was already drawn by the sweeping brush of Guido Reni, lingered over Titian's portraits and admired the Flemish masters. Though unable altogether to penetrate the veil which had previously obscured his view of these old pictures, he could now discern something in them, although inwardly he did not share the professor's view that the old masters were so far ahead of us; he even felt that the nineteenth century in some respects had made significant advances on them, and that our imitation of nature was much more vivid, alive and immediate; in other words, on this score he thought as do all young people who have achieved something new and are proudly aware of it. It would vex him when occasionally he saw some painter from abroad, a Frenchman of German, often not a painter at all by vocation, create a sensation by some legerdemain, a nimble brush-stroke and vivid colours and in no time accumulate a vast amount of money. This feeling of annoyance would not bother him at those times of total absorption in his work, when he would even forget to eat and drink; it only came when his circumstances became so straightened that there was no money for brushes and paints, and his importunate landlord came round ten times a day demanding the rent. Then his hungry imagination would dwell with envy on the lot of the rich artist; then would come the impulse that so often takes possession of Russians: to throw everything to the winds and go on a mad, desperate fling. This was approximately how he felt at the moment.

"Huh! be patient, be patient!" he exclaimed in annoyance. "There's a limit to patience, too. Be patient! and how am I going to buy my dinner tomorrow? No one will give me a loan. And it's no use trying to sell my pictures and drawings: I'd get twenty kopecks for the lot. They've been useful of course: each one of them has helped me in some way, has taught me something. But what use are they really?—they're all studies and sketches, and they'll never be completed. And who would buy them, when they don't know my name; who wants my art

school studies, or my unfinished Psyche, or views of my room, or a portrait of my Nikita, although it is a lot better than the portraits of those fashionable painters? Why do I bother? Why should I suffer, and work away at my ABC like a schoolboy when I could be just as brilliant a success as them and have money?"

Having said this the artist suddenly shuddered and went pale; from a canvas propped up on the floor he saw a feverishly distorted face staring at him. Two terrible eyes bored into him as if preparing to devour him alive; the lips expressed a fearsome command to be silent. Taking fright he wanted to call for Nikita, whose deafening snores could be heard from the hall; but he suddenly stopped and laughed. His feeling of fear vanished instantly. This was the portrait he had bought earlier and since forgotten about. In the glow of the moon, with which the room was suffused, the picture had taken on an uncannily lifelike quality. He set about examining it and cleaning it of dust. He soaked a sponge in water, wiped the picture a few times, removing almost the entire layer of accumulated dust and grime, hung it before him on the wall and stared in even greater amazement at this remarkable work: the whole face had practically come to life and the eyes stared at him so piercingly that he finally shuddered, stepped back, and said in an astounded voice: "It's looking at me, looking with eyes that are human!" He then remembered a story he had heard long before from his professor about a portrait by Leonardo da Vinci, on which the great master worked for a number of years and still regarded as unfinished but which, in Vasari's description, was regarded by everyone else as a most perfect and accomplished work of art. The most remarkable feature of it were the eyes, which amazed the artist's contemporaries; even the tiniest veins had not been forgotten and were recorded on the canvas. However, there was something very strange about this portrait before him. This went beyond art: it violated the harmony of the portrait itself. These were living, human eyes! They looked as though they had been cut out of someone's head and embedded in the picture. Contemplation of the portrait did not uplift the soul in the way a true work of art should however terrible the subject matter; this aroused an unhealthy, morbid reaction. "What can it be?" the artist found himself asking. "This is nature,

after all, real, live nature: so why should I have this weird feeling? Is it that such slavish, literal copying of nature is wrong, and strikes one as harsh and discordant? Or does it mean that if you depict an object with cold detachment, without empathy, it will appear before you only in its own terrible reality, deprived of the illumination that would be shed by some inscrutable idea imparted by its artist. This is the kind of reality which would be revealed if, in an attempt to reach the essence of some noble person, you took up a scalpel, cut him open and revealed the revolting spectacle of his entrails. Why should simple, base nature be represented by one artist in a kind of celestial light, so that the impression of baseness is completely absent and, on the contrary, you feel exhilarated and afterwards everything around you seems to flow more smoothly and calmly, while another artist can take the same subject matter and make it appear base and sordid, while in fact remaining true to life. But no, he has not given it any inner light. It is just like a fine view: however magnificent, it still seems to lack something if the sun is not shining".

He went up to the portrait again to examine these remarkable eyes and realised to his horror that they were definitely looking at him. This was no copy from nature, this was that same uncanny, lifelike look you would expect to find on the face of a corpse risen from the grave. Perhaps this dream-like delirium was induced by the moonlight, bathing everything in its deceptive light, and falsifying the images of daylight, or perhaps it was something else, but he was suddenly afraid to sit alone in the room. He quietly walked away from the portrait, turned aside and tried to ignore it, but his eyes kept turning back against his will. Finally he was even afraid to walk about the room; he felt as though someone was about to walk behind him and he cast timid glances over his shoulder. He was not a cowardly type; but his imagination and nerves were sensitive and that evening he himself could not account for this involuntary fear. He sat in the corner, but at once got the feeling that someone was about to lean over his shoulder and look into his face. Even the snoring of Nikita which reverberated from the hall could not dispel his fear. Finally he arose timidly, careful not to lift his eyes, withdrew behind his screen and lay down on the bed. Through a gap in the curtain he could see his room bathed in moonlight and in it the portrait hanging on the

wall. The eyes bored into him even more terribly, more fixedly, seeming to scorn everything else. Feeling unutterably distressed he forced himself to rise from the bed and taking up his sheet walked across the room and draped it over the entire portrait. After this he lay down feeling calmer and gave himself up to thoughts of the poverty and wretched lot of the artist, of the thorny path he has to tread in life, while his eyes kept turning to the gap in the screen to look at the draped portrait. The moonlight accentuated the whiteness of the sheet and it seemed to him as though the terrible eyes had even become visible through the cloth. In horror he stared harder as if to assure himself that this was nonsense! But eventually he saw that it was true ... he could see quite clearly: the sheet was no longer there ... the portrait was fully exposed and stared past everything else straight at him, its gaze penetrating deep inside him... His heart froze. He saw the old man move and take hold of the frame with both hands. Then he heaved himself up and, thrusting out both legs, leapt from the frame... Now through the gap in the screen he could see only an empty frame. The room echoed with the noise of footsteps which drew closer and closer to the screen. The poor artist's heart started to pound. More dead than alive he waited for the old man's face to appear round the screen. Which in due course it did, the very same jaundiced face with its large eyes now roving about the room. Chartkov tried to cry out but his voice had failed him, he tried to move, but his limbs were paralyzed. With his mouth agape he stared at this tall, terrible phantom, garbed in his capacious Asiatic robes and waited to see what he would do next. The old man seated himself at his feet and proceeded to remove something from under the folds of his robe. It was a bag. He untied it and, holding it by its two corners, shook out the contents: several long, heavy, cylindrical packages fell with a thud to the floor; each of them was wrapped in blue paper and bore the legend: 10,000 rubles. Thrusting his long, bony hands out from his wide sleeves the old man started to unwrap the packages, to reveal the glint of gold. Despite the artist's immense distress and incapacitating fear he could not tear his eyes away from this gold, and watched mesmerized as it was unwrapped, glinted and clinked with a thin dull ring in the old man's bony hands, and was then wrapped up again. At this point he noticed one package which had rolled along the floor

to the head of his bed. He feverishly lunged for it and, in panic, looked to see whether he had been observed. But the old man appeared to be engrossed. He gathered together all his packages, replaced them in the bag and, without a glance at the artist, disappeared round the screen. Chartkov's heart beat harder still as he listened to his retreating footsteps. He clenched his package harder, trembling all over and suddenly heard the footsteps approaching the screen again—the old man must have realised that one package was missing. The next instant his face reappeared round the screen. Overcome with despair, the artist clutched the package with all his strength and did his utmost to move, to cry out—and woke up. He was in a cold sweat; his heart pounded violently: his chest contracted as tightly as if his last breath was trying to escape from it. "Was that really a dream?" he said, gripping his head with both hands; but the terrible lifelike quality of what he had seen made it unlike any dream. As he woke he saw the old man returning into the frame, even catching a glimpse of the hem of his ample robe, and his hand distinctly felt the impression of some weighty object it had been holding a minute before. Moonlight flooded the room, reaching into its dark corners where it lit up a canvas, a plaster-of-Paris arm, cloth draped over a chair, a pair of trousers and muddy boots. Only at this point did he realise he was not lying on his bed any more but standing upright in front of the portrait. How he had got here he was quite unable to understand. He was even more amazed to observe that the portrait was uncovered and there really was no sheet over it. Transfixed with fear he stared at it and saw its living eyes literally boring into him. A cold sweat broke out on his face; he wanted to move away but felt that his feet were rooted to the ground. And then he saw—and this was now no dream—the old man's features move and his lips start to purse as if he wanted to suck him into the picture... He leapt up with a wail of terror and awoke.

Surely that wasn't a dream too? His heart pounding fit to burst, he reached out and felt around him. Yes, he was lying on his bed in the very same position in which he had gone to sleep. Before him stood the screen: the room was filled with moonlight. Through the gap in the screen he could see the portrait, covered as it should be with the sheet—just as he had left it. So it was also a dream! But even now he could still feel

the impression of something in his clenched fist. His heart was beating at a fearful rate; there was an unbearable heaviness in his chest. He stared through the gap at the sheet. At this point he clearly saw the sheet shifting as if there were hands flailing beneath it trying to throw it off. "Lord God above, what is it!" he exclaimed, crossing himself in terror, and woke up.

That, too, was a dream! He leapt from his bed, half out of his mind and unable to comprehend what was happening to him: was this the influence of some nightmare, or a demon, the delirium of a fever or real life? In an attempt to calm his agitation and slow the frantic pounding of his blood, he went over to the window and opened the casement. The cold gust of wind revived him. The roofs and white walls of the houses were still bathed in moonlight, although small dark clouds were scudding across the sky. Silence reigned: his ear could catch only the occasional distant rattle of a droshky, jogging along some unseen alley, its driver asleep on his seat, lutted by the lazy motion of his nag as they waited for a tardy fare. He stood there for a long time, his head thrust out of the window. The first glimmer of the approaching dawn had already appeared in the sky; at last, feeling a drowsiness steal over him, he closed the window, walked away, lay down on his bed and collapsed into a dead sleep.

He awoke very late feeling as though he had a severe hangover: his head throbbed with pain. His room was gloomy and unpleasantly humid with the dampness of the outside air, which seeped through the chinks in his windows, blocked with pictures and primed canvases. Gloomy and cross like a rain-drenched cockerel, he sat down on his tattered divan wondering what to do next, and suddenly remembered his dream. As it came back to him, the dream seemed so appallingly vivid that he even started to suspect that it had not in fact been a dream and mere delirium at all, but a vision. Pulling off the sheet he examined the strange portrait in the daylight. It was true, the eyes were amazingly lifelike, but he could see nothing particularly frightening about them; the only thing was that they gave him a strange and unpleasant sensation in his stomach. Even so he could not totally convince himself that it had been a dream. He fancied that some terrible portion of reality was mixed up with the dream. Something in the old man's look and expression appeared to be saying that he had

been with him that night; his hand felt as though it had just been holding some heavy object which the moment before had been snatched away from him. He felt that if only he had held on to the package a little harder it would have remained in his hand after he woke up.

"Lord God, if only I could put my hands on a little of that money!" he sighed deeply, and in his imagination he saw all the packages being emptied out of their bag, each with their alluring inscription: 10,000 rubles. The packages were unwrapped, there was a flash of gold, and they were wrapped up again, and he sat motionless staring blankly into space, unable to tear himself away from this vision, like a child sitting hungrily before a plate of sweetmeats, watching them being eaten by others. Finally he was rudely brought to his senses by a knock on the door. In came the landlord with a police sergeant, whose appearance is even less welcome to poor people than the face of a petitioner is to the rich. The landlord of the small house in which Chartkov lived was one of those types that you commonly find amongst landlords in the Fifteenth Line on Vassilievsky Island, on the Petersburg Side, or in some distant corner like Kolomna—a type which is very common in Russia and whose character is as hard to define as the colour of a worn-out frock coat. In his youth he had been a loudmouthed captain, who received certain civil assignments as well, was a great one for flogging, efficient, dandified and a complete bonehead; but in his old age all these pronounced traits had blended into a murky vagueness of character. He was by now a widower, already retired, no longer a dandy, nor a braggart, nor a dare-devil, only interested in drinking tea and gossiping while doing so; he would walk about his room trimming the guttering wick of his tallow candle; promptly at the end of every month he would do the rounds of his tenants collecting the rent; he would hold the key in his hand if he stepped out into the street to inspect the roof; would repeatedly chase the janitor out of his cubbyhole whenever he slunk there to sleep; in other words, he was the sort of retired person who, after a reckless youth and bumpy carriage-ride of a life is left with nothing but mean habits.

"Please see for yourself, Varukh Kuzmich," he addressed the police sergeant, spreading his hands: "he won't pay for his flat, won't pay a kopeck."

"How can I when I have no money? Wait a little while and I'll pay up."

"I can't afford to wait, my good man," said the landlord angrily, wagging a key at him; "I have an officer amongst my tenants, Lieutenant-Colonel Potogonkin, he's been renting from me for seven years; and then there's Anna Petrovna Bukhmisterova who rents a shed and two stalls in the stables, she's got three servants—that's the sort of tenants I have. To be quite honest with you, I don't run the kind of establishment where you can live without paying. Be so good as to pay me the rent now and then vacate the premises."

"Yes, seeing as you've agreed you'd better pay," said the sergeant with a slight shake of the head, tucking one finger inside the front of his tunic.

"That's all very well, but what am I supposed to pay with? I haven't got a brass kopeck."

"In that case you shall have to repay Ivan Ivanovich in kind, with the products of your trade," said the sergeant: "he might agree to receive the rent in pictures."

"Oh no, sergeant, thank you, but not in pictures. It would be another thing if they were pictures with a decent subject, so that you could hang them on your wall, some general with a star at least, or a portrait of Prince Kutuzov, but he goes and paints his man, that servant of his in the tatty shirt who grinds his paints. To think of that rascal having his portrait painted—I'll box his ears for him: he's pulled all the nails out of my bolts, the thief. Just have a look at them: here he's painted the room. Fine if he'd taken some tidy, well-ordered room, but he's gone and painted it just as it is with all its rubbish and filth lying around. Just look how he's fouled up my room, please have a good look for yourself. And some of my tenants have been living here for seven years, decent tenants, colonels, Anna Petrovna Bukhmisterova... No, let me tell you: there's nothing worse than an artist for a tenant; he turns his room into a pigsty, God save us from the likes of him."

Meanwhile the poor artist was expected to stand by and listen to all this. The sergeant started examining the pictures and studies, showing as he did so that his mind was much more animated than the landlord's and was even not entirely invulnerable to artistic influence.

"A-ha," he said, prodding one canvas which depicted a nude woman, "this one's rather ... how shall we put it? naughty. But why does that one have a black smudge under his nose, has he spilt some snuff or something?"

"It's the shadow," answered Chartkov curtly without looking in his direction.

"Well, I think you should have put it somewhere else, and not right under the nose—too prominent," said the sergeant; "and who is this a portrait of?" he continued, coming to the portrait of the old man: "what an ugly mug. Was he this ugly in life? The way he's looking at you—frighten the daylight out of you! Who is it of?"

"Oh that's just a..." said Chartkov, but he was interrupted by a cracking noise. The sergeant must have been leaning too hard against the picture frame, and the weight of his brawny policeman's hands had caused the side boards to break inwards, one of these fell to the floor releasing a blue paper package which made a loud chink as it landed. Chartkov's eyes lit on the inscription: 10,000 rubles. He hurled himself at the package and clutched it feverishly in his fist which sagged under the weight.

"Sounded just like money dropping," said the sergeant, hearing the sound of something falling but prevented from seeing what it was by the speed of Chartkov's lunge.

"What's it to do with you, what I have?"

"This is what: you've got to pay your landlord for the flat right away, you have the money but you don't want to pay—that's what it's got to do with me."

"Well, I'll pay him today."

"Why wouldn't you pay him before, causing all this trouble for your landlord, even for the police?"

"Because I didn't want to touch this money; I'll pay him everything this evening and vacate the flat tomorrow, because I have no wish to remain with a landlord like him."

"So, Ivan Ivanovich, he'll pay you," said the sergeant to the landlord. "And if it should happen that he doesn't give you proper satisfaction this evening, then we'll have to apply tougher measures, mister painter." On saying this he donned his tricorne and went out through the door, followed by the landlord, his head bent, apparently lost in thought.

"Thank God I've got rid of them!" said Chartkov, hearing

the door in the hall close. He looked into the hall, sent Nikita off on some errand so as to be completely alone, locked the door behind him and coming back into the room set about undoing the package, his heart pounding wildly. It contained ten-ruble pieces, each mint-new and glowing like fire. Feeling quite delirious he sat next to his pile of gold and marvelled, wondering whether it was all a dream. The bundle contained exactly a thousand pieces; its exterior was identical to those he had seen in his dream. For a while he fingered them, examined them, unable to come to his senses. His imagination lingered over all those stories about hidden treasure, coffers with secret locks, left by ancestors for their descendants, in firm conviction of the latters' ruin and eventual penury. He wondered if perhaps this was the case with his own lucky find: had some grandfather, wishing to leave his descendant a present, hidden it in the frame of a family portrait? Full of romantic delusions he even started wondering if there might not be here some secret link with his own fate, if the existence of the portrait might not be linked with his own, and his acquisition of it a pre-ordained act. He eagerly set about examining the frame of the portrait. On one side a cavity had been carved into the wood, and so skilfully concealed by a board that if the frame had not been ruptured by the beefy hand of the police sergeant the money would have remained intact until the end of time. Examing the portrait he was amazed anew by the artistry, the extraordinary execution of the eyes: they no longer looked terrible to him, but an unpleasant feeling still passed over him every time he looked at them. "No," he said to himself, "I don't care whose ancestor you were, but I'm going to put you behind glass and give you a gold frame." Thereupon he reached out for the pile of gold before him and his heart thumped as he touched it. "What should I do with it?" he mused, staring hard. "I am now provided for at least three years, I can shut myself in my room and work. I now have funds for paints, for food, for tea, my daily needs, my rent, now no one will be able to get in my way or annoy me: I can buy myself a first class dummy, order a plaster-of-Paris torso, model the legs, get myself a Venus, buy up prints of the old masters. And if I work three years for myself, taking my time, not worrying about sales, I'll surpass them all, I can be a great artist."

This is what his reason told him, but deeper down inside him another voice, louder and more persuasive, could be heard. He looked again at the gold and felt more strongly the force of his 22 years and ardent youth. He now had in his power all he had always admired and feverishly craved from afar. He felt his pulse quicken at the very thought of it! To don a fashionable tailcoat, to break his years-long fast, to rent a splendid new flat, repair at once to the theatre, the pastry shop, the ... and so on, and, grabbing his money, he set off into the street.

First of all he visited the tailor, dressed himself anew from head to foot, and gazed at himself in child-like wonder; he bought an array of perfumes and pomades and rented the very first flat he found on Nevsky Prospekt without haggling over the price, a most splendid abode, with mirrors and French windows; absent-mindedly bought himself a most expensive lorgnette, just as absent-mindedly bought a mass of cravats, far more than he needed, had his hair curled in a hairdresser's, drove around the city twice in a carriage for no real reason, gorged himself sick on sweets in a pastry shop and called in at a French restaurant, about which he only knew from vague rumours, and which was as remote from him as the country of China. His head started to throb a little from the wine and he stepped jauntily out onto the street feeling ready to take on the devil himself. He strutted along the pavement peering at all and sundry through his lorgnette. On the bridge he espied his former professor and adroitly avoided him, leaving the astounded professor standing motionless on the bridge, his face contorted into the shape of a question mark.

All his belongings and assorted effects: easel, canvas, pictures, he had transferred that same evening to the splendid new flat. His best pictures he displayed in prominent places, and the worst he pushed away into a corner and then occupied himself striding up and down his splendid rooms, his eyes constantly drawn to the mirrors. His heart seethed with an uncontrollable desire to grasp fame by the scruff of its neck that very moment and flaunt himself before the world! He could already hear the shouts: "Chartkov, Chartkov! have you seen Chartkov's picture? What a nimble brush that Chartkov has! What a powerful talent!" He walked about his room in great excitement, his head awhirl with such thoughts. The

following day, taking ten of the gold pieces, he called on the publisher of a popular newspaper seeking his magnanimous assistance; the journalist gave him a most cordial reception, immediately addressing him as "most respected sir", shaking Chartkov's hand with both of his own, making detailed enquiries about his name, patronymic, place of residence, and the following day there appeared beneath an advertisement for a new type of tallow candle an article with the heading: "Chartkov and His Remarkable Gifts." "We hasten to inform the city's educated inhabitants," it read "of a delightful and splendid new acquisition. No one would deny that our society boasts many excellent physiognomies and marvellous faces, but hitherto we have lacked the means of committing them to miraculous canvas for the benefit of posterity; now this deficiency has been filled: an artist who combines all the necessary qualities has emerged in our midst. Now the society belle can be assured that she will be portrayed with all the grace of her ethereal beauty, with her lovely, enchanting radiance, like butterflies fluttering amongst the flowers of spring. The venerable paterfamilias will be able to view himself in the bosom of his family. The merchant, warrior, patrician, man of state—they can all continue their noble professions with renewed zeal. Hurry, hurry, leave your promenading, abandon your visit to a friend, a cousin, to a dazzling shop—stop what you are doing, wherever you are, come quickly. The artist's splendid studio (Nevsky Prospekt, number such-and-such) is hung about with chefs-d'oeuvre of his brush, an instrument worthy of Van Dykes and Titians. You will not know what is more impressive, the vraisemblance and similarity to the original, or the extraordinarily fresh and vivid brushwork. Praise to you, artist, you have drawn a lucky ticket in life's lottery. Vivat Andrei Petrovich!"—(The journalist, as we can see, liked the personal touch.) "Glorify yourself and us. We will show proper appreciation. May the crowds of people who descend on you, and the money they shall bring, although certain of our fellow journalists are opposed to this, be your reward."

Our artist read this notice with secret satisfaction; his face literally beamed. He had made it into the papers: this was a great occasion for him, and he reread the lines several times. He found the comparison with Van Dyke and Titian particularly flattering. The phrase "Vivat, Andrei Petrovich!" also

greatly pleased him; to be addressed in print by his forename and patronymic was an honour such as he had never experienced before. He started to pace briskly about his room, ruffling up his hair, by turns sitting down in his armchair,then leaping up from it and sitting on the divan, imagining to himself how he would receive his gentleman and lady visitors, walking up to his canvas and making a sweeping stroke with his brush to impart a graceful movement to the arm. The next day his doorbell rang; he ran to open it, admitting a lady, preceded by a footman in a livery coat with a fur collar, and in the company of an 18-year-old girl, the lady's daughter.

"Monsieur Chartkov?" enquired the lady. The artist bowed.

"So much is written about you; your portraits, they say, are the height of perfection." Saying this, the lady perched a lorgnette on her nose and marched off to peruse the walls—which, as it happened, were bare. "But where are your portraits?"

"Being removed," said the artist, a little confused: "I've only just moved to this apartment, so they are still on their way ... they haven't arrived yet."

"You were in Italy?" asked the lady, directing her lorgnette at him, for want of anything else to direct it at.

"No, I wasn't but ... I would like to go there ... in fact for the time being I have postponed my trip... Please, take this chair, you must be tired..."

"Thank you, I have been sitting for a long time in our carriage. Ah there, at last I see your work!" she exclaimed, running to the opposite wall and directing her lorgnette at the studies, sketches, perspective drawings and portraits sitting on the floor. "C'est charmant, Lise, Lise, venez ici: a Tennier room, look: see the disorder, untidiness, the table with its bust, arm, pallette; look at all the dust, look at the way he's painted the dust! C'est charmant! And look at the woman washing her face in this picture—quelle jolie figure! Ah, un mouzhik! Lise, Lise, a mouzhik in a Russian tunic! look: a mouzhik! So you do not paint portraits exclusively?"

"Oh, that's just some nonsense... A little frivolity, studies..."

"Tell me, what's you opinion of today's portrait painters? Isn't it true that there are none of the stature of Titian? They don't have the strength in their colours, or the ... what a pity

that I cannot express myself to you in Russian" (the lady was an amateur of painting and had perused with her lorgnette all the galleries in Italy). "However, monsieur Nolle ... now there's a superb painter! An extraordinary talent! I observe that he has even more expression in his faces than you will find in Titian. You do not know monsieur Nolle?"

"Who is this Nolle?" asked the artist.

"Monsieur Nolle. Ah, such talent! He painted her portrait when she was only twelve. You absolutely must come and see us. Lise, show the monsieur your album. I should tell you that we have come here so that you may begin work on her portrait at once."

"Why of course, I am ready to commence."

And in an instant he had moved up an easel with a prepared canvas, taken up his palette and focussed his gaze on the girl's pallid face. Had he been a connoisseur of human nature he should at once have been able to read in her features the stirrings of a maidenly passion for balls, an awakening ennui and discontent about the length of time till dinner and after dinner, a desire to run out for a walk in a new dress, the deep traces of an apathetic application to various arts enforced by her maman to improve her mind and senses. But all the painter could see in this delicate little face was an artistically intriguing transparency, like that of fine porcelain, an appealing gentle langour, a slender, fair neck and aristocratic frailty. He was already anticipating his triumph, determined to demonstrate the delicacy and brilliance of his brushwork, whose only outlet hitherto had been the coarse features of his uncouth models, the austere visages of antiquity and copies of classical masters. He could already see in his mind how the finished portrait of this pretty little face would look.

"Do you know," said the lady with a slightly anxious frown: "this is how I would like you to paint her: she is wearing a dress at the moment; I must say I would rather she wasn't wearing an ordinary modern dress: I would like her to be dressed in something simple and sitting in the shade of a tree, against the background of a field, with a flock of sheep in the distance, or a grove ... so that you wouldn't think she was on her way to a ball, or a fashionable soirée. Our balls, I must say, are so destructive to the soul, they deaden the feelings so... I'd like to have simplicity, more simplicity." (Alas! it was

apparent from the wax-like countenances of both mother and daughter, that they had danced away too many a night at precisely such balls.)

Chartkov set to work, seated his model, and composed a mental picture of the scene. He waved his brush in the air, marking out imaginary points, narrowed one eye, stepped backwards, studied the scene from afar—and in the course of a single hour commenced and completed the sketch. Content with the result he at once started painting, becoming quite carried away by his work. He had already forgotten everything else, forgotten that he was in the company of aristocratic ladies, and even started to give vent to certain artistic eccentricities, muttering strangely and humming snatches of melody, as does an artist when totally absorbed in his work. Unceremoniously, with a brusque motion of his brush, he got his model to raise her head, before she finally started to fidget and complain of fatigue.

"That will do, enough for the first time," pronounced the lady.

"Just a little longer," said the artist, forgetting himself.

"No, time to stop! Lise, it's three o'clock!" she said, producing a miniature watch which hung by a gold chain from her belt, and exclaimed: "Dear me, look at the time!"

"Just another minute," pleaded Chartkov in the ingenuous and imploring voice of a child.

But the lady, it appeared, was not in the least inclined to indulge his artistic whims on this occasion, but promised to allow him a longer session the next time.

"It's annoying, I must say," thought Chartkov, "I was just beginning to get into my stride." And he recalled that no one had ever interrupted or stopped him when he worked in his studio on Vassilievsky Island; Nikita would sit stock-still in one position and you could paint him for as long as you liked; he even used to fall asleep in the pose he had been put in. Vexed, he put his brush and palette down on the chair and stood gloomily before the canvas. A compliment paid him by the society lady brought him to his senses. He rushed to the door to show them out, and on the staircase received from them an invitation to visit them for dinner one day the following week. He returned to his room looking most pleased with himself. This aristocratic lady had quite enchanted him. Hitherto he

had regarded such creatures as something outside his orbit, born for the express purpose of driving about in splendid carriages with liveried footmen and snazzy coachmen, while casting indifferent looks at the wretched pedestrian, trudging along in his drab overcoat. And now one of these creatures had actually entered his own room; he was painting her portrait, had been invited to dinner in an aristocratic house. He was seized with a feeling of indescribable contentment; in his utter delight he rewarded himself with a magnificent dinner, followed by a visit to the theatre and once again drove aimlessly about the city.

Over the next few days he could not get his mind onto his usual work. He was constantly on tenterhooks, waiting for the moment when the doorbell would ring. At length the aristocratic lady returned with her pale daughter. He seated them, pulled up his canvas with a nimble motion that was an attempt at a fashionable flourish, and started to paint. The sunny day and bright light greatly assisted him. He could see in his spindly model much that, if he could capture it on the canvas, would give the portrait considerable merit; he saw that he would be able to achieve something outstanding if he could convey his perception of the model in all its completeness. His heart began to flutter when he realised that he was going to express that which others had failed to observe. His work took complete possession of him, and he immersed himself entirely in the activity of his brush, allowing himself once again to forget the aristocratic provenance of his model. Breathlessly he watched the delicate features and almost transparent body of the seventeen-year-old girl appear on the canvas. He caught every nuance, the yellow tinge of her skin, the bluish shades under her eyes and was on the point of adding the little pimple which adorned her forehead when he suddenly heard above him the voice of her mother. "Oh, but why paint that? that's not necessary," the lady said. "And look here too, here, in several places ... why, it's even a little yellow, and here there are some dark patches." The painter started to explain that these patches and yellow streaks had a good over-all effect, composing the face's natural and attractive complexion. But he was informed that they did not compose any complexion and had no good overall effect; and that he was imagining all this. "Let me just dab on a touch of yellow in one place, I beg

you," said the artist naively. But he was not permitted this either. It was announced that Lise was a little out of sorts that day, and that her face was never yellowish, but on the contrary, amazing in its freshness of complexion. Sadly he set about painting out the traits his brush had succeeded in catching on canvas. Many barely perceptible nuances disappeared, and with them disappeared much of the picture's verisimilitude. Numbly he started to apply that commonplace colouring which an artist can put on with his eyes shut, and which turns even a life portrait into something cold and academic, as in a painting manual. But the lady was content that the offensive colours had been banished, and only expressed her surprise at the length of time the portrait was taking, adding that she had heard he could completely finish a portrait in two sittings. The artist was lost for a reply to this. The ladies collected themselves up and prepared to leave. He put down his brush, accompanied them to the door and after they had gone remained motionless before his portrait for a long time, staring at it gloomily, stupefied, remembering those fine feminine features, the subtle shades and ethereal tones which he had succeeded in capturing, only mercilessly to destroy them. Full of such reflections he put the portrait aside and sought out a head he had long ago sketched of Psyche. The face had been skillfully executed, but it remained quite cold and academic, consisting exclusively of abstract features and lacking any life whatever. For want of anything better to do he now set to work on it, imparting to it all the shades he had observed in the face of his aristocratic sitter. The features, shades and tones he had captured were here transmitted in the purified form, that is achieved when the artist after staring lengthily at nature withdraws from it to create an artistic work of equal perfection. Psyche gradually came to life, and the thought which had barely been perceptible now began to take on material form. The facial features of the fashionable young girl were willy-nilly imparted to the countenance of Psyche, and this gave her an unusual expression, entitling the portrait to be described as an original work. It appeared that he had made use separately and together of everything his model offered, and had become totally immersed in his work. For several days on end he was completely absorbed in this painting, and it was while thus engaged that his new aristocratic

acquaintances found him. Unprepared, he had no time to remove the canvas from his easel. The two ladies emitted shrieks of delight and clapped their hands.

"Lise, Lise! Ah, what a likeness! C'est superbe, superbe! What an inspired idea to clothe her in Greek costume. Oh, what a wonderful surprise!"

The artist did not know how to disabuse his ladies of their agreeable misconception. Shamefaced and hanging his head he quietly announced:

"That's Psyche."

"Portrayed as Psyche? Why, c'est charmante!" said the mother with a smile, which was reflected by her daughter. "Just look, Lise, how well it becomes you to be portrayed as Psyche. Quelle idée delicieuse! But what work! It is Corregio. I must confess that although I have read and heard about you I did not know that you were possessed of such talent. No, now you absolutely must paint my portrait too."

The lady, it appeared, also wished to appear in the guise of some Psyche.

"What am I to do with them?" thought the artist. "If that is the way they wish it, then let Psyche pass for whomsoever they will", and he pronounced aloud:

"Be so kind as to be seated for a little time, and I will apply a few touches."

"Oh, but I am afraid that you might somehow ... the likeness is so good as it is."

But the artist realised that the ladies were apprehensive about yellow streaks, and he reassured them that he would only make the eyes more sparkling and expressive. Whereas in point of fact he felt thoroughly ashamed and desired to impart at least some similarity to the original, lest he be condemned as a thorough cad. And sure enough, the pale girl's features gradually became discernible in the countenance of Psyche.

"Enough!" called the mother, afraid lest the similarity with her daughter become too great.

The artist was rewarded with everything: smiles, money, compliments, sincere handshakes and invitations to dinner; in other words he received a thousand flattering rewards. The portrait created a sensation in the city. The lady showed it to her friends; they were all astounded by the skill with which the artist had managed to preserve a likeness and yet impart new

beauty to his model. The latter observation was usually accompanied by a flush of envy on the cheek of the speaker. And suddenly the artist was inundated with commissions. It seemed that the entire city were desirous of having their portrait painted by him. His doorbell rang incessantly. In one way this could have been a good thing, in that it gave him the opportunity for infinite practice in variety, in painting different faces. But alas, these were all the sort of people who are difficult to please, or members of high society—which meant that they were even busier than the others, and thus impossibly impatient. The first requirement, invariably, was that it should be done well and quickly. The artist could see that all thoughts of striving after perfection would have to be abandoned, and that he would have to make do with artistic skill and nimble brushwork. He had to grasp the general, the underlying expression and not allow his brush to become diverted by the execution of detail; in other words, it was quite impossible to convey nature in all its exactitude. To which we should add that all his sitters made many other demands on him. The ladies insisted that he depict their soul and character, and disregard the rest, rounding off all the sharp angles, glossing over—or even omitting altogether—all defects. In other words, the portrait had to be one you could gaze on at length, perhaps even fall in love with. Consequently, when they sat for him, they sometimes put on such a mien that the artist was quite astounded: one endeavoured to arrange her features into an expression of melancholy, another sought that of dreaminess, a third was bent on reducing the size of her mouth, pursing it so tightly that it became a mere dot, no bigger than a pin-head. And, despite all this, they would demand that his portraits show a close likeness and natural ease. The gentlemen were no better than the ladies. One demanded that he be portrayed with his head turned at a striking angle; another with eyes turned upward in inspiration; a third, a lieutenant of the guards, demanded a martial sternness in his eyes; a high-ranking official would have his face express greater directness and nobility and his hand resting on a book which announced in clearly legible letters: "He always stood for justice". At first the artist was not a little put out by such demands: he had to think it all out carefully and was not given long to execute these commissions. Finally he got the knack of it, and encoun-

tered no more problems. He could gather from a couple of words how the client wanted himself portrayed. To the would-be Mars he would give the visage of Mars; those with Byronic aspirations he would give a Byronic posture and turn of the head. Should the ladies wish to be Corinna, Undina or Aspasia, he was only too willing to comply with their desires and, unsolicited, would even enhance the beauty of their features, something that is never taken amiss, and for which an artist is sometimes even forgiven a poor likeness. Soon he himself began to marvel at the wondrous alacrity of his brush. While his sitters, it goes without saying, were in veritable raptures, and proclaimed him a genius.

Chartkov became a fashionable painter in all respects. He started to dine out, to accompany ladies to galleries and even on promenades, to dress foppishly and assert loudly that the artist must belong to the bon monde, that he must keep up his reputation, that the common run of artists dress like tramps, do not know how to conduct themselves with decorum, do not maintain the bon ton and are utterly lacking in polish. He introduced a high degree of cleanliness and order in his home and studio, hired two splendid footmen, took on foppish young students, changed his outfit several times a day, curled his hair, set about perfecting his grasp of the etiquette of receiving visitors, busied himself with the beautification of his exterior in every possible way in order to produce the most agreeable effect on the ladies; in other words, it was soon quite impossible to recognize in him the modest artist who had once worked unnoticed by the world in his little garret on the Vassilievsky Island. He now expressed outspoken views on artists and their profession, maintaining that the old masters were far too highly rated, that before Raphael they all painted salted herrings and not people; that the much-vaunted holy aura that surrounds their work is purely a figment of the public imagination; that Raphael himself did not paint all that well and the popularity of many of his pictures is attributable purely to the persuasion of fame; that Michaelangelo was a braggart, because he only wanted to show off his knowledge of anatomy, and lacked any grace whatever, and that true brilliance, artistic power and sense of colour can only be found now, in the present century. And this would, inadvertently, as it were, bring him round to the subject of himself.

"Something I cannot understand," he would say, "is how people can force themselves to sit and slog endlessly at their work. The chap who toils away for several months at a single picture is, in my view, a plodder and not an artist. I do not believe him to have any talent. The genius creates swiftly and boldly. Now this portrait," he would remark, turning to his visitors, "I painted in two days, this head in a day, this in several hours, this in just over an hour. No, I ... I must confess, I don't regard something that has been laboriously painted stroke by stroke as art; that's a trade and not art."

Thus did he regale his visitors, and they in their turn were amazed at the power and agility of his brush, uttering gasps of surprise on hearing how quickly his works were executed and then informing one another: "Now this is talent, real talent! Just listen to him, see how his eyes sparkle! Il y a quelque chose d'extraordinaire dans toute sa figure!"

The artist was extremely flattered to hear such comments. When he read favourable reviews of his work in the journals he was as thrilled as a small child, although this praise was paid for with his own money. He would carry cuttings about with him everywhere, and on contrived pretexts would show them around to his friends and acquaintances, being naive enough to derive great satisfaction from this. His fame grew, and he received more and more commissions. He began to tire of the same old portraits and poses, which he now knew by heart. He felt increasingly loath to paint them, and would endeavour to do nothing beyond the initial sketch of the head, leaving the rest to his pupils. Where previously he had tried to find new poses, to achieve a striking and forceful effect, he began to find this tedious too. His mind grew weary of the constant effort to conjure up new ideas. He lacked both the energy and the time for it: the social whirl in which he tried to play the role of a man of fashion swept him further and further away from work and thought. His style grew cold and uninspired, and without his being aware of it he become confined to stale and monotonous forms. The austere and dreary visages of civil and military officials, invariably spruced up and, so to speak, tightly laced, did not offer much scope to his brush: it began to forget the splendid draperies, the striking poses and the passions. Not to mention the grouping, the artistic drama and its exalted tension. All he ever had to do with was a

uniform, or a corsage, or a tailcoat, objects which chill an artist's brain and stifle his imagination. His pictures now lacked even the most ordinary merits, but for the time being they continued to enjoy renown, although true connoisseurs and artists would dismiss his latest work with a telling shrug of the shoulders. Some of them, who had known Chartkov in the old days, could not understand how he had managed to forfeit that talent which had been so obvious even at the very beginning of his career, and wondered in vain how a person could lose a gift at the very moment when he had achieved the full development of all his powers.

But our intoxicated artist was deaf to these criticisms. He was approaching the time of staidness, both in body and in spirit; was putting on weight and visibly expanding in the waistline. His name was now accompanied by epithets in the newspapers and journals: "our distinguished Andrei Petrovich", "our worthy Andrei Petrovich". He was offered honorary positions, invited to examine, to sit on committees. He now started, as is the rule with those getting on in years, to lean towards Raphael and the old masters—not because he was entirely convinced of their great merit but in order to use them as a weapon against young artists. For, as is the wont of those entering his station of life, he was beginning to inveigh against all young people without exception for their lax morals and free-thinking ways. He was beginning to believe that everything came easily in life, that there is no such thing as inspiration from above and that everything must be subjected to a single strict regime of decorum and uniformity. In other words, his life had reached the stage when everything spontaneous shrinks within a person, when emotional impulses carry more feebly to the soul and do not stir the heart with penetrating sounds, when contact with beauty no longer transforms virgin strength into fire and flame, and when the burnt-out senses become more receptive to the clink of gold coin, when he begins to respond warmly to its alluring music, and gradually, unwittingly, allows himself to be lulled insensible by it. Fame can give no pleasure to him who has come by it dishonestly, undeservedly; it will produce a constant tremor of excitement only in the person who is worthy of it. Therefore did all his feelings and impulses become directed towards gold. Gold became his passion, his ideal, his fear, his pleasure, his

purpose. The bundles of banknotes grew in his coffers, and like all those who are fated to receive this terrible gift, he became dull and unreceptive to everything save gold, and started to hoard without reason, to collect without purpose and was on the point of turning into one of those creatures who have become so numerous in our insensitive world, who are regarded with horror by those full of life and feeling, to whom they appear like walking coffins of stone with dead matter in place of a heart. But then something happened to jolt him back to life.

One day he perceived on his desk a note in which the Academy of Arts asked him, as one of its distinguished members, to come and state his opinion of a new picture, sent from Italy by a Russian artist working there. This artist was one of his former friends, who since an early age had nourished a passion for art, immersing himself heart and soul in it with all the zeal of a dedicated servant, cutting himself off from family, majestic friends and favourite pastimes to haste to that vineyard of the arts with its glorious skies, the wondrous city of Rome, whose name alone sends a quiver through the ardent heart of the artist. There he immersed himself in toil, like a hermit, and allowed nothing to distract him. It mattered nothing to him what people thought of his character, of his gaucherie, of his ignorance of social etiquette, or of the disrepute into which he brought the artistic profession by his wretched and scruffy dress. It mattered nothing to him that his colleagues might be annoyed with him. He gave himself up entirely to art, spurning all else. He haunted the galleries, standing motionless for hours on end before the canvases of the great masters, studying and analysing their wonderful brushwork. He would never complete any work without checking what he had done against the achievements of these great teachers and without finding in their immortal creations unspoken yet eloquent advice for himself. He never entered into loud debates and arguments; he neither advocated nor condemned the purists. He gave everything its due, extracting only that which was beautiful, and finally retained as his teacher only one painter, the godlike Raphael, just as the great poet-painter himself, having perused many great works, full of magnificent splendour and beauty, had finally retained by his side only one book, Homer's *Iliad*, having discovered that it con-

tained all one might possibly require, and that there was nothing in any other work which was not reflected here in exquisite perfection. Thus did he derive from his schooling the sublime idea of creation, the mighty beauty of thought and the magnificent charm of his heavenly brush.

Entering the hall Chartkov found that a great throng of visitors had already gathered before the picutre. They stood in a profound silence, a rare phenomenon with such crowds of connoisseurs. He quickly composed his features into the self-important expression of an expert and stepped up close to the picture—but Lord, what did he see!

Before him hung a painting as pure, beautiful and virtuous as a virgin bride. The artist's creation soared above everything humbly, divinely, innocently and simply, like pure genius. It was as though the celestial figures on the canvas were startled by the great number of eyes staring at them, and had bashfully lowered their beautiful eyelashes. The connoisseurs were astounded by the phenomenal power of the artist's brush. The picture appeared to contain everything: an echo of Raphael, reflected in the noble poses; an echo of Corregio, in the accomplished brushwork. But most striking of all was the picture's revelation of the artist's creative power. It suffused every detail in the picture, and everywhere there was symmetry and inner strength. He had caught that melting roundness of line that is descried in nature only by the eye of the true artist and which the hack renders angular. It was obvious that what the artist drew from the outer world he first absorbed into his soul, whence it surged forth as from a spiritual spring, in harmonious and triumphant song. It was at once apparent, even to the laymen, how great a gulf divides the true artistic creation from the mere copy of nature. An ineffable silence hung over all those who stared at the picture, no rustle or spoken sound could be heard, while with every minute the picture appeared to soar upwards; it seemed to detach itself from its surroundings and, growing steadily more radiant and marvellous, was suddenly transformed into a moment, the fruit of divine inspiration, that moment for which the entire life of a human being is but a preparation. The observers felt tears forming in their eyes. It was as though all tastes, all brash and misguided deviations from good taste had been fused together into an unspoken hymn to this divine work of art. Chartkov

stood before the picture stock-still, his mouth agape, and finally, when the other viewers and connoisseurs gradually unwound and began to discuss the merits of the painting, and when he was requested to express his own views, he recovered his senses; he wished to compose his features into an indifferent, everyday expression, and give one of those brisk and trite dismissals practised by such stale artists, along the following lines: "Yes of course, we certainly cannot deny that the artist has talent; he does have something; you can see he wishes to express something; however, as to the fundamental thing..." and to add, of course, the sort of faint praise which would damn any artist. He wanted to say something to this effect but words failed him, and in lieu of an answer he burst into violent sobs and hurtled from the room like a madman.

Once back home, he stood motionless and insensible in his magnificent studio. His whole being, his life had been reawakened as if his youth had suddenly returned to him, as if the extinguished sparks of his talent were once again flaring up. Suddenly the bandages slipped from his eyes. Lord! to think he had relentlessly squandered the best years of his youth; had destroyed, extinguished the spark which had perhaps glowed in his breast, the spark which could perhaps by now have flared up in all its glory and splendour, and which might also have caused others to weep with astonishment and gratitude! To have destroyed all this, and destroyed it utterly without remorse! At that moment he felt again the surge of excitement and eagerness that he had once known so well. He seized hold of a brush and stepped up to a canvas. Beads of sweat formed on his brow with the strain; his whole being was aflame with one idea: to paint a fallen angel. This idea seemed to conform most closely to his state of mind. But, alas! his figures, poses, groupings and thoughts when on canvas looked forced and disjointed. His technique and imagination had been caught in a rut for too long and this urge to break through the limits and cast off his self-imposed fetters proved impotent, ringing false and untrue. He had disdained the long and tortuous uphill path of acquiring preliminary knowledge and learning the primary laws of the attainment of future greatness. Vexation overcame him. He ordered all his recent works removed from his studio, all his lifeless, fashionable pictures, all his portraits of hussars, ladies and State Councillors. He then locked

himself into his room, leaving word that no one was to be admitted and immersed himself in work. He sat at his work like a patient youth, like a young apprentice. But all the results of his labour were ruthlessly unrewarding. He was halted at every step by his ignorance of the most fundamental elements; his enthusiasm was dashed against the simple and hollow mechanical skills he had evolved, which formed an impassable barrier to the imagination. His brush involuntarily turned to stale forms, the angel's arms were folded in the same stilted way, its head proved unable to make an unaccustomed turn, even the very folds of its clothing were wooden and refused to submit to his will, refused to drape themselves over the unfamiliar pose of the body. All this he could see and sense for himself!

"But was I ever really talented?" he finally asked himself. "Was I not deluding myself?" Having uttered these words he sought out his early works which at one time he had worked on with such pure dedication, so disinterestedly, in his poor garret on the isolated Vassilievsky Island, far from the crowds, from the abundance and caprices of life. He now went up to them and started to examine each of them with care, while images of his old impoverished life returned to his memory. "Yes," he pronounced in despair; "I did have talent. Signs of it are visible everywhere..."

Standing there he suddenly shuddered from head to toe: his eyes had encountered another pair of eyes which stared fixedly back at him. This was that strange portrait which he had bought in Shchukin Dvor. All this time it had been covered up and obscured by other pictures and had completely vanished from his memory. Now, as if by design, when he had removed all the fashionable portraits and paintings which cluttered up his studio, it re-emerged to stand alongside the works of his youth. Remembering its strange history he recalled that in a way this peculiar portrait had been the cause of his metamorphosis, that the fortune which he had so miraculously acquired had led him astray on all his vain pursuits and thereby destroyed his talent, and he felt his soul filling with rage. He at once called for the hated portrait's immediate removal. But this did not bring his agitated soul any peace: all his emotions and his entire being had been shaken to the core, and he experienced that fearful torment that is sometimes and exception-

ally manifested in nature when a mediocre talent endeavours to outreach itself and cannot find expression, that torment which can lead a young man on to great things, but which in one who has already reached the limits of his dreams can only become an unquenchable thirst, an unbearable pain making a man capable of terrible deeds. Bile rose in his gullet when he saw a picture which bore the stamp of talent. He would grind his teeth and sear it with the glare of a basilisk. In his soul there arose that most infernal of all human longings and he threw himself into its fulfilment with the energy of one possessed. He set about buying up all artistic works of any merit. Having purchased a picture at a high price he would carefully carry it back to his room and throw himself at it with the fury of a tiger, tearing it asunder, ripping it into pieces and stamping on it, accompanying all these actions with shouts of delighted laughter. The countless riches he had amassed enabled him to satisfy this diabolical longing. He untied all his bags of gold and opened up his caskets of treasure. Never before had any monster of ignorance destroyed so many works of beauty as were destroyed by him in his maddened pursuit of vengeance. Should he appear at an auction all the other buyers despaired of purchasing any work of art. It was as if the enraged heavens themselves had sent down to earth this terrible scourge to wrest from it all its harmony. This terrible passion stained his whole countenance: his face became permanently joundiced. A hatred of the world and negation of life itself were stamped on his very features. He was like an embodiment of that terrible demon which Pushkin has portrayed in ideal terms. His lips uttered nothing but words of poison and eternal condemnation. Encountering him on the street was like coming across a harpy, and even his friends, espying him from afar, hastened to turn back and avoid meeting him, asserting that such an encounter would suffice to poison the rest of their day.

Fortunately for art and the world at large a life led at such a pitch of unnatural strain could not endure long: the scope of his passion was too massive and unbalanced for his feeble strength. Fits of rage and madness attacked him with increasing frequency until they finally turned into a terrible sickness. He succumbed to such a fierce combination of high fever and galloping consumption that after a mere three days

of it was reduced to a shadow of his former self. To this were added all the symptoms to hopeless insanity. At times several men together had not the strength to hold him down. He started to see in his mind's eye the long forgotten, but still living eyes of that extraordinary portrait, and at such moments his rage was terrible. All the people standing around his bed looked to him like fearful portraits. He started to see the portrait double, quadruple; all his walls seemed to be hung with portraits whose fixed, living eyes bored into him. Diabolical portraits stared down at him from the ceiling, up from the floor, the room expanded and stretched away into infinity, in order to accommodate more and more of these frozen eyes. The doctor who had undertaken to treat him and had already acquainted himself to some extent with his strange history, endeavoured with all his might to discover the underlying relation between his hallucinations and the events of his life, but without any success. The sick man comprehended and felt nothing apart from his torments, and uttered only horrible wails and incomprehensible jabbering. In the end his life was cut short in a final and silent spasm of suffering. His corpse was awful to behold. Nothing could be found of his immense wealth; but when people saw the torn fragments of the great works of art which he had bought for amounts totalling millions they understood to what terrible use this wealth had been put.

PART II

A great number of carriages, droshkys and broughams stood before the gates to a house in which an auction was being held of the property of one of those great art lovers, who blissfully slumber away their lives lost among their zephyrs and cupids, unsuspectingly earning themselves the reputation of patrons of the arts, by generously squandering on paintings the millions accumulated by their prudent fathers and often by their own earlier labours. These patrons are of course an extinct breed, and our nineteenth century has taken on the boring visage of a banker who only derives pleasure from his millions in the form of figures written out on paper. The long hall was filled with the most variegated throng of visitors, drawn like vultures to carrion. Amongst them was an entire flotilla of

Russian merchants from the central arcade and even the flea market, attired in their dark blue German coats. In these surroundings their appearance and expression became somehow more at ease and self-possessed, and they shed that smarmy servility that is the hallmark of the Russian merchant in his natural element, attending to a customer in his shop. Here they behaved entirely without ceremony, despite the fact that in this very room stood many of those aristocrats before whom they were usually only too willing to bow and scrape. Here they were quite uninhibited, unceremoniously prodding and fingering the books and pictures, anxious to assess their sturdiness, and boldly bidding against their titled opponents. Here there were great numbers of those inevitable sales-goers, who attend an auction daily before eating breakfast; there were aristocratic connoisseurs, who felt themselves duty-bound never to miss an opportunity of augmenting their collections and with nothing better to do between the hours of twelve and one; and finally there were those noble gentlefolk, with threadbare clothes and pockets, who turn up every day unmotivated by any thought of material gain, but with the sole purpose of seeing how it all ends, who pays the most, who the least, who outbids whom and who gets what. A great number of pictures were scattered about higgledy-piggledy; mixed in amongst them were pieces of furniture and books with the ex libris plates of previous owners, who, it might be suspected, entirely lacked any of that laudable curiousity that might have induced them to investigate their contents. Chinese vases, marble slabs for tables, new and old bandy-legged furniture adorned with gryphons, sphinxes and ball-and-claw feet, gilt and ungilt, chandeliers, oil lamps—all this stood about in confused heaps and displaying none of the order found in shops. The visitor beheld a chaos of the arts. In general auctions evoke in us mournful feelings: everything in them seems redolent of a funeral cortège. The halls in which they are held are always gloomy; the windows, obscured with piles of furniture and pictures, let in a meagre trickle of light, the hushed faces and the funereal voice of the auctioneer, beating down sales with his hammer and calling out the funeral dirge of the wretched arts, here brought into such strange confrontation with one another. All this combines to intensify the eerie impression created by such occasions.

The auction appeared to be in full swing. A large number of decorous people had thronged forward and were bidding excitedly. On all sides calls of "a ruble, a ruble, a ruble" could be heard, and before the auctioneer had time to repeat the bids from the crowd, they had risen to four times the starting price. The crowd was bidding for a portrait which could not but impress anyone who had the least understanding of painting. It clearly demonstrated a powerful talent. The portrait had apparently been restored on several occasions and depicted the swarthy features of an Asiatic in flowing robes, with the strangest and most unusual expression, but what struck the observers most of all was the extraordinarily lifelike quality of the eyes. The longer you gazed at them the deeper they seemed to bore into you. This strange quality, this trompe l'oeuil fascinated almost all those present. Many had already withdrawn from the bidding which had reached a fantastic figure. There remained only two well-known aristocrats and artlovers, each determined at all costs to make this picture his own. They grew heated and would have raised the price beyond all reason, had not one of the lookers-on suddenly announced:

"Allow me to interrupt the bidding for a moment. For I have perhaps greater entitlement than any other person to this portrait."

At once all attention was focussed on the utterer of these words. He was a slender man of about thirty-five, with long curly black hair. His attractive face, filled with a carefree radiance, was evidence of a soul alien to the vanity of this world; his attire displayed no pretensions to fashion: everything about him was eloquent of the artist. And indeed this was artist B., known personally to many of those present.

"You may think what I say very strange," he said, observing the general attention focussed on him, "but if you deign to hear out my story you may perhaps see that I was quite justified to say what I did. All the signs assure me that this is the very portrait I have been searching for."

The faces of all present positively burned with quite natural curiosity, and the auctioneer himself, his mouth agape, froze with his hammer in mid air, and prepared to listen. At the beginning of the story many of them repeatedly turned their eyes to the portrait, but as his story became increasingly fascinating all eyes focussed on the narrator.

"You all know that part of town which is called Kolomna." Thus did he begin his account. "Here everything is different from the other parts of St. Petersburg; it is neither metropolitan nor provincial; you seem to feel, as you enter the streets of Kolomna, that all your youthful desires and enthusiasm are leaving you. The future does not enter these parts, here quiet and retirement reign, and all the residue from the bustle of the streets finds a home. Amongst those who settle here you find retired civil servants, widows, people of modest means who have acquaintances in the Senate, and have therefore condemned themselves to spend practically their entire lives here; cooks who have retired from service and spend their whole day bustling about the market, gossipping with the porter in their neighbourhood shop and buying a daily ration of 5 kopecks' worth of coffee and 4 kopecks' worth of sugar, and finally that whole class of people who can be described with the epithet ash-grey, people whose attire, faces, hair, eyes have the same dull grey appearance as one of those days when there are neither storm clouds nor sun in the sky, but something quite indeterminate: a mist settles and blurs the outlines of all objects. To these we can add retired theatre commissionaires, retired titular councillors, old war horses with gouged out eyes and scarred lips. These people are utterly impassive: they walk along looking neither to right nor to left, saying nothing and thinking nothing. In their rooms you will not find much in the way of belongings; there may be nothing more than a bottle of pure Russian vodka, which they quaff mechanically all day long without ever experiencing that rush of blood to the head, enjoyed by young German craftsmen, who favour a more vigorous intake, when these swells of Meshchanskaya Street lord it alone over the pavements in the small hours of the morning after their Sunday binge.

"Life in Kolomna is fearfully solitary: a carriage is a rare sight; if you're lucky you may see the odd one conveying actors, and shattering the general quiet with its rattling and clanking. This is the domain of the pedestrian; cabbies can only be seen plodding along passengerless, carrying hay to feed their bearded nags. A flat can be rented for five rubles a month even inclusive of morning coffee. The widows who live here on their pensions constitute the most aristocratic stratum; they conduct themselves in a refined manner, often sweep out

their rooms, and like to chat with their friends about the terrible price of beef and cabbage; their possessions usually include a young daughter, a quiet, self-effacing creature, often of pleasing aspect, a revolting little dog and a wall clock whose pendulum emits a melancholy ticking. After them come the actors, whose finances do not permit them to move out of Kolomna, a freedom-loving race, like all stage folk, living only for pleasure. You will find them sitting in their dressing gowns fixing a revolver, gluing together some useful household contraption out of pieces of cardboard, or playing draughts or cards with a visiting friend, and spending their evenings in exactly the same manner as their mornings, only with the occasional addition of punch. After these, the élite of Kolomna, come the ordinary riff-raff. They are as hard to enumerate as the infinite variety of insects which breed in old vinegar. You will find old ladies who pray; old ladies who drink; old ladies who both pray and drink; old ladies who subsist on mysterious means, dragging old rags and linen like ants from the Kalinkin Bridge to the flea market, in order to sell them there for fifteen kopecks; in other words, the most wretched dregs of humanity, whose lot even the most philanthropic politician would have been hard put to improve.

"I have mentioned them here in order to demonstrate how often people of this kind are constrained to hunt for some sudden source of temporary aid, to have recourse to loans, and this leads to the emergence in their midst of a particular genus of extortionist, who provides them with small sums of money for large pledges and at high percentages. These petty usurers are often even more callous than their more exalted colleagues, because they proliferate in a milieu more ragged and poverty-stricken than any the rich money-lender will ever encounter, who only has dealings with a carriage-borne clientele. Thus any lingering remnants of humane feelings are soon expelled from their hearts. Amongst these money-lenders there was one ... but I should point out here that the incident I have undertaken to relate to you belongs to the last century, namely the reign of our late sovereign Empress Catherine the Second. As you will realise, the actual appearance of Kolomna as well as its inner life must have changed considerably since then. Thus, amongst these money-lenders there was one—a remarkable character in every respect, and a resident of long

standing in these parts. He went about in flowing Asiatic robes; his swarthy complexion betrayed his southern provenance, but to exactly which nationality he belonged, whether Hindu, Greek, or Persian, no one was able to say for sure. His height, his unusually large frame, his swarthy, sunken and haggard features with their hideous colouring, his large eyes with their uncanny gleam and his overhanging, bushy eyebrows, set him strikingly apart from the city's ashen inhabitants. Even his abode was quite unlike the little wooden houses around it. It was a stone structure of the sort once built in great numbers by Genoese merchants, with irregular and unmatching windows, iron shutters and bolts. This money-lender differed from the other representatives of his profession in that he was able to provide absolutely anyone with whatever sum they required, from the poorest of beggar-women to a spendthrift court grandee. Before his house the most dazzling carriages often pulled up, through whose windows you could glimpse the exquisite head of a society lady. Rumour had it that he possessed iron trunks full of countless riches, jewels and all sorts of pledges, but that for all this he had none of the cupidity characteristic of other money-lenders. He lent money out willingly, giving what were regarded as very favourable terms of repayment. But by some strange arithmetic machinations he always made his loans attain exorbitant interest. Such, at any rate, was how rumour had it. But the strangest thing of all and a source of general wonderment was the fate that befell all his debtors: they all, without exception, met unhappy ends. It remains uncertain whether this was merely public opinion, absurd superstitious gossip or deliberate slander. But there were several vivid and striking examples, which took place in the space of a short time before the eyes of all. A youthful scion of one of the best aristocratic families of the time came to the public attention, having carved a most distinguished career in the state service, proving himself an ardent champion of everything that was exalted and of true value, an amateur of all products of art and human genius, showing all the signs of a future patron of the arts. Soon he earned the approval of the sovereign herself, who appointed him to a high position that fully answered his own requirements, a position in which he was able to do great things for learning and for the common weal. The young noble surrounded himself with

artists, poets and scholars. He longed to provide them all with work and inspiration. He undertook personally to finance a great number of useful publications, commissioned a mass of works, sponsored competitions as a form of encouragement, expending huge sums of money on all these projects and driving himself into straitened circumstances. But, fired with his magnanimous energy he was loath to renounce these activities, sought all sorts of avenues for loans and finally turned to the aforesaid money-lender. Having received from the latter a substantial loan the young noble soon underwent a complete transformation: he became a scourge of talent and a persecutor of developing minds. He started to see something bad in all literary works and twisted the meaning of every word he read. Then, as ill luck would have it, the French revolution took place, and this gave him the ammunition for all sorts of malicious attacks. He saw revolutionary tendencies in everything and read innuendoes everywhere. He became so suspicious of everything that he eventually started to suspect himself, composing terrible and unjust denunciations and wreaking unhappiness all about him. Naturally enough, news of these activities could not fail to reach the throne. Our benevolent sovereign was horrified, and full of the nobility of soul which graces monarchs, delivered an address, the exact words of which have not, alas, come down to us, but whose deep import has remained imprinted in the hearts of many. Her Majesty remarked that it is not under monarchic rule that the exalted and noble impulses of the soul are suppressed, and creations of genius, poetry and the fine arts despised and persecuted, but, on the contrary, that monarchs have been their only true patrons; that the Shakespeares and Molières of this world have flourished under their magnanimous protection, whereas Dante was unable to find himself a niche in his republican state; that true geniuses are born when nations and their lords are at their zenith of power and splendour, and not when they are dogged by disgraceful political goings-on and republican terrorism, which to this day have not brought the world a single poet; that we should exalt poets and artists, for they are able to instill in the souls of others peace and serene tranquility, and not agitation and murmur; that scholars, poets and all exponents of the arts are pearls and diamonds in the imperial crown; they cannot but enhance the beauty and increase the

brilliance of the epoch of a great sovereign. Her Majesty, having uttered these words, was at that moment divine in her splendour. I can remember that old men were unable to discuss this matter without tears. Everyone became involved in the matter. It should be noted to the credit of our national pride that the Russian heart is marked by the splendid inclination to take the side of the underdog. The nobleman who had betrayed the trust put in him was accordingly punished and removed from his position. But a far more terrible punishment was written on the faces of his fellow countrymen. This was the decisive and universal contempt in which they held him. Words cannot describe the suffering endured by his conceited soul; his injured pride and shattered hopes combined together to cut short his life in fits of terrible insanity and delirium.

"There was another striking example for all to see, in the person of a great beauty—of whom our northern metropolis could at that time boast a good number—but this one far outshone all the others. She embodied a marvellous fusion of our northern beauty with that of southern climes, a jewel of rare brilliance. My father himself confessed that never in all his life had he seen anything to compare with her. She seemed to be a happy combination of everything: wealth, intelligence and lovely disposition. She had hosts of suitors, and the most notable of these was prince R., the best and the most noble of young men, extremely handsome and given to the most dashing chivalrous deeds. He was like a women's ideal taken from a novel, a Grandison in every respect. Prince R. was passionately and madly in love; this love was returned by one just as ardent. But the relatives regarded the match as an unequal one. The prince had long since lost his birthright, his family had gone down in the world, and the sorry state of his affairs was common knowledge. Suddenly the prince left the capital for a while, putting it about that he wished to right his affairs, and returned in incredible splendour. He threw magnificent balls and fêtes and became known at court. The father of the beautiful girl began to look on him with favour, and the city prepared for a most exciting wedding. Whence this change in the bridegroom's fortunes, this fabulous wealth had come no one could say for sure; but a rumour went around that he had entered into some contract with a money-lender and received a loan from him. Be this as it may, the marriage was the talk of

the town. Both bridegroom and bride were the object of everyone's envy. Their ardent and constant love for one another was known to all, as well as the long wait that had been forced on them and the high merits of both. Ardent ladies anticipated the heavenly bliss that the young couple would enjoy. But things took a quite different course. A terrible change took place in the husband in the course of a single year. His character, hitherto noble and gracious, became poisoned with the venom of suspicion and jealously, intolerance and captiousness. He became a tyrant and tormentor of his wife, and, something that no one would have predicted, had recourse to the most inhuman deeds, even taking the whip to her. At the end of a year no one would have recognized the woman who but a short time before radiated joy and had crowds of complaisant admirers following in her wake. Finally, no longer able to endure her miserable lot, she was the first to suggest divorce. The very mention of the word threw her husband into a terrible rage. Propelled by his fury he burst into her room brandishing a knife and would undoubtedly have stabbed her had he not been seized and restrained. In a paroxysm of despair he turned the knife on himself—and ended his life in terrible agony.

"In addition to these two cases, which unfolded before the eyes of all, tales were told of a great number of others concerning members of the lower classes, almost all of whom met terrible ends. Honest and sober men took to the bottle; a shop assistant robbed his employer; a cabbie, who had earned an honest living for a number of years, murdered a passenger for a few kopecks. Such occurrences, which were never related without embellishments, could not fail to strike terror into the hearts of the simple inhabitants of Kolomna. No one had any doubt but that this man was possessed of some dark power. It was rumoured that the conditions he offered were such as to make the hair stand on end and which the unfortunate victim could never dare pass on to anyone else; that his money had a magnetic property, became red-hot by itself and bore certain strange marks ... in other words, there were all sorts of ridiculous stories. But the remarkable thing was that the entire population of Kolomna, this whole world of impoverished old women, petty civil servants, minor actors and, in a word, all those little people whom we have just been talking about,

preferred to endure the worst of hardships rather than turn to this evil money-lender; there were even cases reported of old women starving to death who chose thus to mortify their flesh rather than to destroy their souls. People felt an instinctive fear on meeting him on the street. Passers-by carefully stepped back and stared after him for a long time, watching his striking tall frame disappear into the distance. In his outward appearance alone there was so much of the extraordinary that no one could help but ascribe to him some supernatural anima. Those striking features, hewn so deeply into his face, as in no other person; his burnished bronze complexion; the inordinate shagginess of his eyebrows, his burning, intolerable eyes, even the very folds of his flowing Asiatic robes—all these seemed to proclaim that the passions of ordinary human beings paled by comparison with the passions that burned in this breast. My father would always stand stock still on encountering him, and could never refrain from exclaiming: "The devil, the devil himself!" But I should quickly acquaint you here with my father, who incidentally is the primary hero of this story.

"My father was a remarkable man in many respects. He was one of those rare artists, one of those marvels, which only the chaste loins of mother Russia can produce, a self-taught painter, who sought guidance only in his own soul, without teachers or schools, rules or guidelines, driven purely by the desire for perfection and proceeding according to principles perhaps unknown to himself, along the path to which his soul pointed him; one of those prodigies of nature whom their contemporaries often contemptuously dub ignoramuses but who are not discouraged by criticism and failure, rather deriving from them new zeal and strength and leaving far behind those works which earned them the name of ignoramuses. He had a deep instinct for the essential meaning of every object; he was able to grasp the true significance of the term 'historical painting'; understood how a simple head, a simple portrait by Raphael, Leonardo, Titian or Corregio could be called historical painting and why an enormous painting on a historical subject would never be anything more than a tableau de genre, despite the artist's pretensions to historical art. Both his inner feelings and his personal convictions guided his brush to Christian subjects, to the supreme and ultimate degree of sublimity. He was free of the conceit or

irritability, inherent in the character of many artists. He was a man of firm character, honest and straightforward, coarse even, covered with a fairly hard outer crust and not without a certain inner pride, accustomed to state his opinion of people in both tolerant and sharp terms. 'Why listen to them,' he would say, 'after all, it is not them I work for. I do not paint my pictures for their sitting rooms, they are placed in churches. Those who understand me will be grateful, those who do not will pray to God just the same. A man of the world cannot be blamed for not comprehending art;—if he plays a good hand of cards, knows a thing or two about wine and horses—why should the chap know any more? Indeed, should he get it into his head to dabble in the arts, and start giving himself intellectual airs he would only make a terrible nuisance of himself. Each unto his own, may each of us follow his own concerns. Personally I have more respect for the man who says straight out that he does not understand a thing than for the man who puts on hypocritical airs, claiming to know what he does not and only making a mess of things.' He worked for modest fees, asking only the money he required for the upkeep of his family and to provide himself with the wherewithal for his work. Furthermore, he never, on any account, refused to help others and to hold out a helping hand to colleagues in need; he professed the simple, pious faith of his forefathers and it was perhaps for this reason that he was able to achieve in his portrayal of the saints the sublime expression which brilliant talents were unable to depict. Finally, through the consistent merit of his work and his unflinching adherence to the path he had chosen he even began to win the respect of those who had dubbed him an ignoramus and home-spun amateur. He received an unceasing flood of commissions for churches and was never short of work. One of these orders particularly absorbed him. I no longer remember exactly what its subject was, I know only that it was necessary to portray somewhere in the picture the spirit of darkness. For a long time he pondered over what image to give it, he wanted to embody in it all that was oppressive, all that weighed on man. During such reflections the image of the mysterious money-lender would sometimes enter his mind and he found himself thinking: 'That's who I should take as the model for my devil.' Just imagine his surprise when one day, as he worked in his studio, he heard a

knock on the door, which opened to admit the terrible money-lender. He felt an inward shudder which ran down his entire body.

" 'Are you an artist?' the visitor asked my father without any preliminaries.

" 'I am,' said my father in bewilderment, wondering what was to come next.

" 'Good. Paint my portrait. I will probably die soon, and I have no children; but I do not wish to die altogether, I wish to live. Can you paint a portrait such as to be absolutely like something alive?'

"My father thought to himself: 'What could be better? He has come and offered himself as a devil for my picture.' He gave his word. They agreed on a time and a fee and on the very next day, palette and brush in hand, my father arrived at his client's house. The fenced-in courtyard, dogs, iron gates and shutters, arched windows, chests draped in exotic carpets and finally the extraordinary master of the house himself, seated motionless before him, all made a strange impression on him. The windowsills seemed to be deliberately cluttered up to such an extent that the windows only admitted light from a slit at the top. 'Damnation, this is the ideal lighting for his face!' exclaimed my father to himself, and threw himself eagerly into the painting, as if afraid that this fortunate light would not last. 'What power!' he repeated to himself, 'if I can make him even half as striking as he looks he will destroy all my saints and angels, they will pale next to him. What diabolical power! If I can just achieve a shadow of a likeness he will leap from the canvas. What extraordinary features!' he repeated constantly, his enthusiasm for his subject mounting as he began to see certain of the features taking shape on his canvas. But the closer he grew to completion the more conscious he felt of an oppressive anxiety, which he could not himself account for. Nevertheless, despite this anxiety, he prevailed upon himself to record with literal accuracy every nuance of feature and expression. He gave closest attention to the eyes. These eyes contained so much power that he despaired of capturing them on his canvas. However, at whatever the cost, he determined to seek out their every trait and shade of expression, to fathom their mystery... But no sooner had he begun to explore them with his brush than his soul filled with such repulsion, such

strange oppression, that for a while he was forced to abandon his painting. Eventually he could bear it no longer, he felt that the eyes were searing his soul and filling him with incomprehensible fears. The next day this alarm mounted, and on the third it was stronger still. He became afraid, threw down his brush and declared outright that he could not continue. The response of the strange money-lender upon hearing these words was amazing. He flung himself at my father's feet and implored him to finish the portrait, declaring that on this depended his whole destiny and existence in the world, that my father had already touched his living features with his brush and that, if he succeeded in conveying them truly, his life would be preserved through a supernatural force in the portrait, that thanks to this he would not die altogether, but live on in the world. My father was overcome with horror at hearing these words: they sounded so strange and terrible to his ears that he threw down both his brushes and his palette and dashed headlong from the room.

"The memory of what had occurred worried him all day and night, and the next morning he received the portrait from the money-lender, delivered by some woman, the only person who remained in his service, who declared then and there that her employer did not want the portrait, would pay nothing for it and was sending it back. That same evening he learnt that the money-lender had died and that preparations were already being made to bury him according to the rites of his religion. All this seemed incomprehensible to him. And at the same time a perceptible transformation took place in his own character: he was overcome by feeling of anxiety, the reason for which he could not fathom, and soon he committed a deed which no one would have expected of him. For some time the works of one of his pupils had been attracting the attention of a small group of connoisseurs and artlovers. My father had always been aware of his talent, and had consequently accorded him special attention. Suddenly he started to feel envious of him. The universal interest and discussion that this painter aroused became intolerable to him. Finally, to cap it all, he learnt that his pupil had been invited to paint a picture for a recently restored and rich church. This was too much for him. 'No, I shall not let that young pup get away with his triumph!' he announced. 'Don't be so hasty, my lad, to grind the

faces of your elders in the dirt. I've still got some strength in me, thank God. Now we shall see who ends up in the dirt first.'

And this upright and honest man stooped to all manner of intrigue and machinations of the sort that he had always abhorred; in the end he succeeded in having a contest held for the picture enabling other artists to put forward their entries.

Whereupon he locked himself in his room and set feverishly to work. It was as though he desired to summon up all his strength, all his being, and he did indeed produce one of his best works. No one had any doubt but that the prize would go to him. The pictures were entered and all the others were as night before day beside his own creation. Then one of the members of the jury, a clergyman, if I am not mistaken, came out with an unexpected criticism which amazed all. 'There is certainly a great deal of talent in the artist's picture,' he said,. 'but there is no holiness in his faces; there is even the contrary, something demonic in their eyes, as if the artist had been propelled by some evil influence.' On looking closely at the picture all those present were forced to agree with the speaker.

My father dashed forward to his picture as if to check for himself the truth of this most offensive remark and noted with horror that he had given nearly all the figures the eyes of the money-lender. They looked at him with such demonic destructive force that he gave an involuntary shudder. The picture was rejected, and to his indescribable vexation he was forced to see the prize go to his pupil. Words cannot describe the rage in which he returned home. He almost attacked by mother, chased us children away, smashed his brushes and easel, seized the portrait of the money-lender from the wall, called for a knife and for a fire to be kindled in the hearth, intending to cut it into pieces and burn them. He was busy with the execution of this plan when an acquaintance entered the room, a painter like himself, invariably content and unperturbed by any distant longings, happily working away at whatever chanced his way, and even happier to sit down to a good meal or a binge with his friends.

" 'What are you doing, what are you planning to burn?' he asked, stepping up to the portrait. 'My dear chap, that is one of your very best works. That's the money-lender who died recently; why, it's a perfect likeness. It's a spitting image, it's

more than lifelike. Even in real life you do not get eyes staring at you like that.'

" 'Well, now we shall see what they look like in the fire,' said my father, preparing to toss it onto the flames.

" 'Stop, for mercy's sake!' cried his friend, restraining him, 'better give the picture to me if you find it so unbearable to look at.'

"At first my father was loath to agree, but eventually submitted and his jovial friend took the portrait off with him, delighted at this new acquisition.

"After he had left my father at once felt easier in his mind. It was as though the removal of the portrait had lifted a great weight from his soul. He himself was amazed at the malice and envy he had displayed and at the change in his character. Reviewing his actions he grew sad and declared remorsefully:

" 'No, this must be a punishment from God; I deserved to be thus shamed with my picture. It was designed to destroy my fellow painter. My brush was guided by a satanic sense of envy, and this demonic influence was bound to be manifested in the picture.'

"He at once set off in search of his former pupil, embraced him warmly and begged his forgiveness, endeavouring as far as possible to expiate the guilt he felt towards him. His painting resumed its former untroubled path; but his face took on a pensive look. He turned more often to prayer, was more taciturn than usual and no longer so outspoken in his opinions of people; the harsh exterior of his character appeared to soften. Shortly thereafter he received another rude shock. For a long time he had not seen the friend who had asked to be given the portrait. He was planning to pay him a visit when suddenly the friend appeared in his room. After a brief exchange of pleasantries he announced:

" 'Goodness, brother, you were quite right to wish to burn that portrait. Devil take me if there isn't something strange about it... I don't believe in sorcery but, by my troth, there's an evil force lurking in it...'

" 'What do you mean?' asked my father,

" 'Well, from the moment I hung it up in my room I had this oppressive feeling ... just as if I wanted to murder someone. In all my life I've never experienced insomnia, but now I started suffering not only from insomnia but also had

such nightmares that... I'm not even sure myself whether they were dreams or something else: I felt as though I was suffocated by some evil spirit and I kept on seeing that accursed old man. Really, I don't know how to describe my state of mind. I've never known anything like it. I was wandering around all those days like a madman, feeling some fear, an unpleasant sense of foreboding. I felt unable to say a cheerful or sincere word to anyone; it's just as though someone was constantly spying on me. And the moment I gave the portrait to a nephew who had begged me for it I felt as though a stone had been lifted from my shoulders: I at once recovered my high spirits, as you can see. Yes, my friend, you brought the devil to life!'

"My father heard him out with rapt attention and finally asked:

" 'So the portrait is now in the hands of your nephew?'

" 'I should think not! He coundn't stand it either,' replied his jovial friend, 'it seems the old money-lender's soul has taken possession of the portrait: he will elap out of the frame and stride up and down the room; and the things my nephew told me are simply incomprehensible. I would have regarded him as insane if I had not had some experience of it myself. He sold the picture to some collector, who also couldn't keep it for long and quickly passed it on to someone else.'

"This account had a powerful effect on my father. He became seriously preoccupied, declined into melancholy and finally became totally convinced that his brush had served as a tool for the devil, that some portion of the money-lender's life had after all entered the portrait and was now disturbing people, inducing in them diabolical delusions, leading artists astray, afflicting them with the terrible torment of envy, and so on and so forth. Three tragedies which then befell his family, the sudden deaths of his wife, daughter and infant son, he took to be a divine judgement on him and resolved to withdraw from the world forthwith. The moment I had turned nine years old he placed me in the Academy of Fine Arts, and, having first settled all his debts, departed for a distant monastery, where he shortly took the monastic vows. There he amazed all his brethren by the strictness of his life and his punctilious observance of all the monastic rules. The Father Superior of the monastery, upon learning that he had been a skilled painter, commissioned him to paint the main icon in the church.

But the humble brother declared that he was unworthy to take up his brush, that it had been besmirched, that he must first purify his soul through toil and great self-sacrifice, in order that he might once again be worthy to undertake such work.

No pressure was put on him, and he himself increased to the utmost the severity of his monastic regime. Finally even this seemed insufficient to him and not severe enough. He received the Father Superior's blessing to depart for the wilderness, that he might be entirely alone. There he built himself a hut of branches, subsisted on a diet of raw roots, hauled stones from place to place, stood motionless on one spot, his hands raised heavenwards reciting prayers, from sunrise to sunset. In other words, he appeared to be subjecting himself to the ultimate test of his endurance and to that extraordinary self-denial instances of which can usually only be found in the lives of the saints.

Thus for a period of several years did he mortify his flesh, at the same time sustaining it with the live-giving strength of prayer. Finally he returned one day to the monastery and firmly announced to the Father Superior: 'Now I am ready. If God is willing I shall perform my appointed task.' The subject he took for his picture was the Nativity of Christ. For a whole year he worked at it, never leaving the confines of his cell, taking hardly any of the frugal monastic fare and engaging in constant prayer. At the end of the year the picture was finished. It was, without question, a miracle of art. Although neither the brethren nor their father superior were particularly versed in the fine arts, they were all astounded by the extraordinary holiness of the figures. The aura of divine humility and meekness in the face of the Mother of God, as she bent over her child, the deep wisdom in the eyes of the Godchild, which seemed to see far into the distance, the solemn silence of the kings, awed by the divine miracle and kneeling at His feet, and finally the holy, ineffable quiet which pervaded the whole picture—all this was represented with such harmonious force and powerful colour that its effect was no less than magical.

All the brethren sank to their knees before the new icon and the awed Father Superior declared: 'No, such a painting cannot have been painted by man with the help of human art alone: a higher, holy force quided your brush, and the blessing of the heavens rests on your work.'

"At this time I completed my studies in the Academy and won the gold medal and together with this prize the joyous hope of a voyage to Italy—the dream of every twenty-year-old painter. It only remained for me to take my leave of my father, from whom I had parted twelve years before. I confess that even his image had long since faded from my memory. I had heard something of the severe sanctity of his life and prepared myself to meet someone with the desiccated look of a hermit, estranged to everything in the world save his cell and his prayers, worn out and withered from eternal fasting and vigil. Imagine my surprise when before my eyes I saw a resplendent, beatific patriarch! His face bore no traces of self-mortification, and glowed with the radiance of heavenly joy. His snow-white beard, and fine, almost ethereal hair of the same silvery hue picturesquely flowed down his chest and over the folds of his black cassock, falling almost to the cord tied around the waist of his austere monastic habit. But the most remarkable thing for me was to hear what he had to say about art, words and thoughts which I know I shall retain long in my soul and I wish sincerely that all my fellow artists would do likewise.

" 'I have been waiting for you, my son,' he said, when I came up to receive his blessing. 'You are about to set off on the path which your life shall now follow. Your chosen path is a pure one, do not be led astray from it. You have talent; talent is God's most valuable gift—do not squander it. Examine and study everything that you see, submit all to your brush, but learn to seek the inner meaning to everything, and above all endeavour to fathom the great mystery of creation. Blessed are the chosen few who hold this secret. No object of nature is base to them. The creator and artist is just as strongly evident in things insignificant as he is in things great; in the contemptible there is no contempt in his work, for the beautiful soul of the creator permeates it invisibly, and the contemptible, having passed through the purgative of his soul, has thereby been given elevated expression. All art contains for man a hint of the divine, of heavenly paradise, and by virtue of this fact alone it transcends all matter. A great work of art is higher than all things on earth to the same extent that heavenly repose is higher than all earthly vanity, that creation is higher than destruction, that an angel through the very innocence of his

radiant soul higher than all the immeasurable powers and infinite conceitful passion of Satan. Bring forth all you have in sacrifice to art and love it with all your heart. Love it not with the passion that is pervaded with earthly lust, but with serene heavenly passion; without this man is powerless to raise himself aloft from earth and cannot utter the wondrous notes of solace. For it is to bring solace and peace to all living things that a great work of art comes down to earth. It cannot cause the soul to murmur, but is a harmonious prayer yearning eternally towards God. But there are moments, moments of darkness...'

"He paused, and I observed his radiant countenance darken, as if crossed by a sudden cloud.

" 'There was one such occasion in my life,' he said. 'To this day I am unable to comprehend what was behind that strange image whose picture I painted. It was certainly some diabolical phenomenon. I know that the world rejects the existence of the devil, and thus I shall not speak of him. Let me say only that I painted him with repulsion, and did not feel the slightest attraction to my work. I sought to subjugate my feelings and by suppressing the revulsion of my soul to paint him true to life. This was no work of art, and for this reason the emotions which affect all those who behold it are uneasy, disturbed emotions, and not the emotions of an artist, for an artist breathes tranquility even in his anxiety. I am told that this portrait is being passed from hand to hand spreading disquiet, breeding in the artist a feeling of envy, of dark hatred for his neighbour and an evil desire to persecute and oppress. May the Almighty preserve you from such terrible passions! There is nothing worse than them. Better to suffer yourself the pain of the worst possible persecution than to inflict the merest shadow of persecution on anyone else. Preserve the purity of your soul. He who is blessed with talent must be purest in soul. Much can be forgiven his fellows but he cannot be forgiven. The man who steps forth from his home attired in bright festive clothing need only be splashed with a single spot of mud from a passing carriage for everyone to surround him, pointing at him and discussing his slovenly aspect while these same people would not perceive a mass of worse stains on the ordinary everyday attire of other passers-by. For stains do not show on workaday garb.'

"He gave me his blessing and embraced me. Never in my live have I been so uplifted and moved. With a reverence that surpasses filial affection I clung to his breast and pressed my lips to his flowing silver locks. Tears glistened in his eyes.

" 'I ask you to fulfil one request, my son,' he said as we were about to take our leave of one another. 'It may pass that one day you see somewhere the portrait of which I have spoken. You will recognize it at once by its remarkable eyes and their unnatural expression, I ask you, at whatever cost, to destroy it...'

"As you can see for yourselves it was only natural that I gave my oath to carry out this request. Throughout the past fifteen years I have not come across anything even remotely resembling the portrait described by my father, until I saw it at this auction today..."

At this point the artist, without completing his sentence, turned his eyes to the wall, in order to have another look at the portrait. His motion was copied by the entire crowd of listeners, turning as one man to behold the extraordinary portrait. But to their great astonishment the picture was no longer on the wall. A babble of voices at once ran through the entire crowd and through it the word "stolen" could clearly be discerned. While the listeners' attention had been distracted by the narrative someone had swiped the portrait. For a long time after this all those present remained unsure as to whether they had really seen these extraordinary eyes, or whether it had all been merely a vision which appeared momentarily before their own eyes, wearied by long contemplation of antique pictures.

1834-1842

THE GREATCOAT

In the department of ... but I think we'd better not say in which department exactly. For all these departments, regiments, chancelleries—in a word, all estates of government service are the most bad-tempered lot. Nowadays private citizens take any insult addressed to them personally as an insult against society as a whole. There is a story that recently a complaint was received from the police inspector of some town or other, in which he declared in no uncertain terms that all the state's institutions were going to the dogs and that his own sacred name was most decidedly being taken in vain. As proof he appended to his petition a massive volume containing some romantic composition, in which every ten pages a police inspector was featured, sometimes in a state of complete inebriation. Thus, to avoid any such unpleasantnesses we had best call the department with which we are concerned *a certain department.* Thus, *in a certain department there served a certain official*; the official cannot be described as very remarkable; he was shortish, somewhat pockmarked, with somewhat reddish hair, apparently with somewhat less than perfect eyesight, with a somewhat receding hairline, wrinkles on both sides of his cheeks and of what might be called a haemorrhoidal complexion... Well, it can't be helped! St. Petersburg's climate is to blame. As for his rank (and with us rank is the first thing that has to be declared), he was of the genus: eternal Titular Councillor, who, as the reader will know, are the butt of wit and mockery of many a writer, given to the commendable

habit of hitting out at those who cannot hit back. The official's surname was Bashmachkin. From which it can be seen that the name originates from *bashmack,* a shoe; but when, at what time and in what manner this derivation from a shoe came about we cannot say. Both his father and his grandfather, and even his brother-in-law, indeed absolutely all the Bashmachkins went about in boots, never changing them and only having them resoled three times a year. His first name and patronymic were Akaky Akakievich. This may strike the reader as somewhat strange and affected, but I can assure him that no affectation entered into its selection, and that the very circumstances of his naming were such that no other name was possible. It all happened like this. Akaky Akakievich was born in the night of, if my memory does not deceive me, March the 22nd. His late mother, herself the wife of an official and a very fine woman, resolved to christen the child in the proper manner. The mother was still lying in her bed opposite the door, with the godfather on her left, an excellent gentleman, Ivan Ivanovich Yeroshkin, a head clerk in the Senate, and the godmather, wife of a police officer, a women of rare virtues, Arina Semyonovna Belobryushkova. The new mother was given the choice of three names: Mokkey, Sossy, or after the martyr Khozdazat. "No," thought the good lady, "those aren't the right sort of names." To appease her the calendar was opened at another page, and once again three names were proposed: Trifilly, Dula and Varakhasy. "This is my punishment," announced the old lady, "all such odd names, I can't say I've ever heard the like before. Varadat or even Varukh would be one thing, but not Trifilly and Varakhasy." They turned to yet another page and were confronted by Pavsikakhy and Vakhtisy. "No, it is clear to me now," said the old lady, "that this is the hand of destiny. Better let him take his father's name. His father was Akaky, so let the son be Akaky too." Thus did he acquire the name Akaky Akakievich. The child was duly christened, and in the process he started crying and pulled such a face as if he were having premonitions of one day becoming a titular councillor. So now you know how all this came to pass. We have made this digression in order that the reader might see for himself that his was a matter of sheer necessity and it would have been quite impossible to give him any other name. When and at what age he entered the depart-

ment and who appointed him no one would now be able to say. Directors came and went, superintendents succeeded superintendents, but he remained in the very same spot, in the very same position, in the very same job, a humble copying clerk; so that afterwards people swore that he must have been born into the world in exactly that state, complete with uniform and receding hairline. Absolutely no respect whatever was accorded him in the department. The porters not only did not rise to their feet when he walked past, they even did not look at him; he could have been a fly flitting through the reception hall. His superiors acted towards him in a cold and despotic manner. An assistant head clerk would thrust papers under his nose, without even bothering to say "Copy this lot", or: "Here's a nice, interesting little job", or something friendly as is usual in more civil establishments. He would take them, looking only at the papers, noticing neither who had given them to him, nor whether they had the right to do so. He would take them and at once set about copying them. The young officials would mock him and make fun at his expense, to the limits of their clerkish wit, relating all sorts of fictitious stories about him in his presence, about his landlady, a woman in her seventies, saying that she beat him, asking when their marriage was to take place, tearing up paper and throwing it over his head like confetti. Akaky Akakievich would not counter this with a single word, acting as if there were no one before him; it did not have any effect on his work: in the midst of all these pranks he would not make even a single error in his copying. Only if the fun got quite out of hand, when his arm was jogged, preventing him from continuing his work, would he protest: "Leave me alone, why do you torment me?" And there was something strange about his words, and about the tone of voice in which they were spoken. They contained something verging on the pathetic, which caused one young man of recent appointment, who followed the other's example in poking fun at him, suddenly to stop dead in his tracks, and henceforth to see all and everything around him in a different light. Some unnatural force thrust him away from his new friends, whom he had taken to be decent, cultivated people. And for a long time after that, in times of great merriment, he would recall this downbent clerk with a receding hairline and his penetrating words: "Leave me alone, why do you torment

me?" and in these words he could hear another message: "I am your brother." At these moments the poor young man would cover his face with his hands. Many a time during his life did he shudder at the sight of man's cruelty to man, at the vicious coarseness concealed behind a refined, educated and civilized veneer and, Lord! even in those whom the world has recognized as noble and honest.

You would scarcely have found another who so punctiliously carried out his duties. It was not merely that he served with diligence, nay, he served with love. In his work, his copying, he could see a world that was colourful and attractive. His face would take on an expression of pleasure; certain letters of the alphabet he particularly favoured and if he encountered them he would be quite beside himself: he would chuckle and wink and mouth sounds, so that it was possible to read in his face every letter described by his pen. Had he been suitably rewarded for his zeal he might well have become—to his great astonishment—a state councillor; but all his reward, as his witty workmates put it, was a badge on his frontside and piles on his backside. However, it cannot truthfully be said that absolutely no attention was given him! One director, by nature a kind man who wished to reward him for his long service, gave orders that he be given something more important to do than the usual copying; namely, he was ordered to write a report of a completed case for another office; all the task involved was changing the heading and shifting the odd verb from the first to the third person. This was such hard work for him that he broke into a terrible sweat, mopped his brow and finally announced: "No, better give me something to copy." After that he was left as a simple copy-clerk. Outside this copying there seemed to be no other world for him. He did not attend at all to his dress: his uniform was no longer green, but a sort of mottled rust. Its collar was low and narrow, so that his neck, although of medium length, stuck out and looked extraordinarily long, like the necks of these plaster-of-Paris kittens with nodding heads that foreign hawkers carry in baskets on their heads. And there would always be something sticking to his uniform: either a piece of straw or a thread; furthermore he was particularly adept, when walking along the street, at passing under windows when slops and rubbish were being thrown out of them, and thus he invariably carried on his

hat bits of rind and melon skins and similar refuse. Not once in his life had he paid any attention to the daily happenings and goings-on in the street, which are always so carefully observed by his young colleagues in the service, who have so sharpened the keenness of alert glance that they will even notice someone on the other side of the street who has allowed his stirrup-strap to come loose—an oversight that is sure to evoke a scornful smile on their faces.

But when Akaky Akakievich ever looked at anything he only saw all about him the even lines described in his neat hand, and only if some passing horse should happen to thrust its nose over his shoulder and emit a blast of horsy breath through its nostrils onto his cheeks would he perhaps notice that he was in the middle of the street and not the middle of a line of his copying. On his arrival home he would at once seat himself at the table, tuck into his soup and eat a piece of beef with onions, quite oblivious to their taste, complete with flies and whatever else the good Lord saw fit to provide. When he felt his stomach starting to swell he would rise from the table, fetch an ink-well and set about copying the papers he had brought home. Should there be no such papers, he would make a copy for himself, for the sheer pleasure of it, and particularly should the document be notable—not for the eloquence of its style, but for the novelty or importance of its addressee.

Even at that hour when the grey sky of St. Petersburg is shrouded in total darkness and all its race of officials have dined and sated themselves, each in their own way, in accordance with their means and culinary preferences, when the clerkdom of St. Petersburg are resting from their daily scratching of pens, from the fuss and bustle of their own and other departments and from all the extra and unnecessary work voluntarily undertaken by all those of a restless disposition, when the officials are hastening to devote their remaining free time to pleasurable pursuits: the more enterprising dashing to the theatre, some roaming the streets, peeking under the ladies' natty bonnets, some passing the evening addressing compliments to some attractive maiden, the star of a small constellation of officials, some, and this is their most common occupation simply, setting off to a colleague's third or fourth-floor flat, where he occupies two small rooms and a hall or kitchen sporting certain fashionable pretensions, a lamp or

some other knick-knack, obtained at the cost of many a sacrificed dinner and night on the town; in other words, even at the time when all officials disperse around the small flats of their friends to play storm whist, sipping tea out of glasses and eating cheap rusks, drawing on long churchwarden pipes, and relaying during the dealing some slander picked up from high society, which the average Russian always and in whatever state finds totally irresistible, or even, when there is nothing else to talk about, retelling the age-old joke about the commandant who is informed that the tail of the horse on Falconet's monument has been docked—that is to say, even at that time when the rest of the world is looking for entertainment Akaky Akakievich would not permit himself any such frivolity. No one could say that they had ever seen him at a party. Having sated himself with the pleasures of copying, he would go to bed, smiling at the thought of the morrow, at what God would send him to copy. Such was the peaceful life led by a man who with a salary of four hundred rubles was able to be content with his lot, and such would it have continued, perhaps, to a hoary old age, were it not for certain disasters which lie in store not only for titular, but even privy, state, aulic and all other councillors and counsellors, and even for those who neither give nor take counsel of any sort.

All those who receive a salary of four hundred or thereabouts have a fierce enemy in St. Petersburg. This enemy is none other than our northern frost, although you also hear it said that it is good for the health. At eight in the morning, the very hour when the streets fill with clerks scurrying to their departments, it goes to work, delivering such mighty and stinging fillips on all noses that the wretched clerks desperately seek some way of concealing them. At such times, when even those in senior positions feel the skin on their faces tightening with cold and tears springing to their eyes, the poor titular councillors are utterly defenceless. The only chance of survival is to dash four or five blocks at top speed in their thin, threadbare overcoats, until they reach the haven of the porters lodge, where they stamp their feet until all their frozen talents and clerkly capabilities have thawed out. There came a time when Akaky Akakievich started to feel particularly sharp stabs of cold in his back and shoulders, despite the speed at which he endeavoured to scurry across the necessary distance. He

finally wondered whether there may not be any faults in his overcoat. Examining it carefully at home he discovered that in two or three places, namely on the back and shoulders it had worn as thin as sack-cloth, becoming quite transparent, while beneath it the lining had shredded away. We should observe here that Akaky Akakievich's coat also served as the butt of his fellow clerks' humour; they had even stripped it of its name of overcoat and dubbed it his smock. In fact it was rather strange to look at: its collar became smaller and smaller every year as it was used to make new hems for the coat. These repairs did not do great credit to the art of the tailor and were baggy and awkwardly done. Thus divining the source of the problem, Akaky Akakievich resolved that the coat had to be taken to Petrovich the tailor, who resided somewhere on the fourth floor of a back staircase, and who, despite his squint and pockmarked face, was rather deft at repairing the trousers and tailcoats of officials and other clients, deft, that is, when he was sober and his attention not taken up with some other undertaking. We do not really need to say very much about this tailor, but as it is now customary in stories to give a full description of the character of each of the dramatis personae there is nothing for it but to have a close look at Petrovich too. Originally he was simply called Grigory and was the serf of some landowner; he took the name Petrovich when he received his release and started to drink rather liberally on saints' days, first on only the big holidays, but then indiscriminately, wherever the day was marked with a cross in the calendar. In this respect he was true to our ancestral habits, and in quarrels with his wife would call her a godless woman and a German. And since we have now brought his wife into the picture we will also have to say a couple of words about her; unfortunately not much was known about her. It was only known that Petrovich had a wife, who even wore a lace cap rather than a headscarf; it appeared, however, that she could not boast of great beauty; at any rate, of the men who walked past her only guardsmen would look beneath the brim of her cap, giving a twitch of their moustaches and making a strange noise.

As he ascended the staircase leading to Petrovich's shop, a staircase which, to be perfectly truthful, was thoroughly anointed with slops, and everywhere gave off that acrid smell that so stings the eyes and which, as the reader will know, is an

inevitable concomitant of all back staircases in St. Petersburg—as he ascended the staircase Akaky Akakievich was already speculating how much Petrovich would ask and inwardly resolved to pay no more than two rubles. The door was open, because the tailor's good wife had produced so much smoke in the kitchen in the process of cooking some fish, that you could not even see the cockroaches. Akaky Akakievich walked through the kitchen, unobserved by the tailor's wife and finally made his way into the workroom where he saw Petrovich sitting on a big unpainted wooden table with his feet tucked beneath him like a Turkish pasha. His feet were bare, as is usual with tailors when they are seated at their work. The most prominent feature on them was his thumb, familiar to Akaky Akakievich, with its mangled nail, as thick and tough as tortoise shell. Hanging round his neck Petrovich had a skein of silk and cotton thread and on his knees some scraps of cloth. For the last three minutes he had been trying unsuccessfully to thread a needle and was consequently very angry at the darkness in the room and at the thread itself, and was muttering away: "Go in, damn you! It's enough to drive you mad, the scoundrel!" It was upsetting to Akaky Akakievich that he should have come in at a moment when Petrovich was angry: he preferred to make his orders when Petrovich was feeling mellow, or, as his wife would say, when "he's been hitting the bottle again, the one-eyed devil". In this state Petrovich would usually be quite amenable to his clients' requests, agreeing with deep bows and expressions of gratitude. Later, admittedly, his wife would come complaining that her husband had been drunk and therefore agreed to do the work too cheaply; but usually you would only have to add another ten kopecks and the job was in the bag. Now, however, Petrovich appeared to be quite sober, and therefore abrupt, intractable and likely to demand diabolical prices. Akaky Akakievich quickly took stock of the situation and would have liked to beat a hasty retreat but it was too late. Petrovich directed his good eye at him with a fixed stare and Akaky Akakievich automatically pronounced: "Goodday, Petrovich!" to which the latter replied "Goodday to you, sir!" fixing his eye on Akaky Akakievich's hand, to see what sort of booty he was being brought.

"I er... just called in, Petrovich, this here..."

At this stage we should point out that Akaky Akakievich expressed himself for the most part with the use of prepositions, adverbs and all sorts of particles which do not actually mean anything. If the situation was particularly awkward he would not even complete his sentences at all, and frequently, after saying something like: "Well, you see ... it's actually..." he would trail off, under the impression that he had said all he intended to say.

"What is it?" asked Petrovich, studying his uniform carefully with his good eye, starting from the collar and proceeding to the sleeves, the back, the skirts and buttonholes, all of it being only too familiar to him, as it was all his own work. Such is the custom of tailors and the first thing they do on encountering a client.

"Well, it's like this, Petrovich ... this coat of mine, the cloth ... you see, it's quite strong in other places, it's just a bit dusty and looks sort of old, but it's actually new, only here in this one place it's a little sort of ... on the back, and on one shoulder ... it's a little worn, and here on this shoulder, too ... there, you see, that's all. Not much work at all, really..."

Petrovich took the "smock", spread it out on the table, studied it carefully, shook his head and leaned across to the windowsill for a round snuff-box with the portrait of some general, it is not clear which one exactly, because someone had poked his finger through the place where the head had been painted and the hole had been covered with a square piece of paper. Taking a pinch of snuff Petrovich stretched the coat out on his hands and held it up against the light. Once again he shook his head. Then he turned up its lining and shook his head again, and once again reached for the snuff-box and removed the lid with the portrait of a general, covered with a piece of paper, placing a pinch of snuff in his nostril, replaced the lid, put away the box and finally announced:

"No, it can't be fixed: the garment's worn out!"

Akaky Akakievich's heart sank at these words.

"But why can't it, Petrovich?" he said, in an almost childish, pleading voice: "I mean it's really only on the shoulders, surely you have some sort of pieces of cloth..."

"I've got pieces of cloth all right, that's no problem," said Petrovich. "But I can't sew them on: the thing's completely rotten, put a needle through it and it'll just come apart."

"Let it come apart and then you can put a patch on straight away."

"But there's nothing to put the patch onto, nothing to hold it fast, you've worn it terribly thin. You could hardly even call it cloth any more: get it in a strong wind and it'll fall to pieces."

"But just fix it on somehow. I mean, it can't really!.."

"No," stated Petrovich decisively: "there's nothing can be done about it. It's had it. You'd do better, when the cold winter days come, to cut it up into leggings, because socks don't keep your feet warm. They were invented by the Germans, to squeeze more money out of people"—Petrovich never missed a chance of having a dig at the Germans—"and it looks as though you'll have to have yourself a new coat made".

On hearing the word "new" Akaky Akakievich felt dizzy, and the room swam before his eyes. The only thing he could see at all clearly was the general with paper stuck over his face on the lid of Petrovich's snuff-box. "How do you mean a new one?" he asked, feeling befuddled, "I haven't got the money for it."

"Yes, a new one," replied Petrovich with sadistic coolness.

"Well, and if I had to have a new one, how much would it sort of, you know..."

"You mean, how much would it cost?"

"Yes."

"Well, a hundred and fifty should about cover it," said Petrovich with a significant pursing of his lips. He was extremely fond of devastating effects, liked to say things which would stun and then slyly watch the expression on the face of his stunned listener caused by these words.

"One hundred and fifty rubles for a coat!" exclaimed poor Akaky Akakievich, raising his voice for perhaps the first time in his whole life, being a person of exceptionally soft-spoken ways.

"Yes sir," said Petrovich, "and you can pay a lot more for a coat. Put a marten collar on it, and a hood with a silk lining and you run into the two hundreds."

"Please, Petrovich," said Akaky Akakievich, in an imploring tone, closing his ears to Petrovich's words and all his

effects: "fix it up somehow or other, won't you, so it just lasts a bit longer at least."

"No; that would mean a waste of work and money," said Petrovich, and on hearing this final verdict Akaky Akakievich took his leave, a broken man.

After the departure of his customer Petrovich sat immovably for a long time, pursed his lips significantly and did not resume his work, so pleased was he with himself for not letting down either himself, or the tailor's art.

Coming out onto the street Akaky Akakievich felt as though he was dreaming. "Well, there's a thing," he said to himself, "and to think it should turn out this way." Then, after a short silence he added: "Well so there it is!" This was followed by another silence, a long one, after which he said: "Well there! Who would have now ... what a ... sort of ... that is ... what a turn of events!" Having said this he did not repair home but set off in quite the opposite direction without himself realising what he was doing. On the way a grimy chimney-sweep bumped into him and completely blackened his shoulder; a whole hatful of lime was dumped on him from the top storey of a building under construction. He was oblivious to all this, and only when he collided with a policeman, who had put down his halberd in order to shake some snuff out of his tobacco-horn into his rough palm, did he come to his senses a little, and then only because the policeman said to him: "Where the hell do you think you're going, no room on the pavement or something?" This made him look round and turn back home. Here he started to collect his thoughts and saw his position in its proper light, talking to himself not in his usual jerky way, but coherently and openly, as if with a reasonable friend, with whom one could discuss the most intimate and delicate matter. "Well no," said Akaky Akakievich, "there's no sense in arguing with Petrovich now: he's sort of... His wife must have sort of thumped him one. I would do better to go to him on Sunday morning: after the Saturday evening before he will be cockeyed and half asleep, and need a drink for his head, but his wife won't give him any money, and there I'll pop him ten kopecks and he'll listen to reason and then the coat will sort of..." Following this line of argument Akaky Akakievich cheered himself up and come the following Sunday waited until he saw Petrovich's wife leave the house on some

errand and at once presented himself to Petrovich. As he had thought, Petrovich was certainly groggy, his head drooped and his eyes were thick with sleep, but all the same when the question of the coat was brought up it was as if the devil had got into him. "No," he said, "you'll have to order a new coat." Whereupon Akaky Akakievich slipped him a ten-kopeck piece. "Thank you, kind sir, I'll fortify myself with a little something and drink your health," said Petrovich, "but it's no use asking me to mend your coat: it's no good for anything at all. I'll make you a new coat, a splendid greatcoat, and let's leave it at that."

Akaky Akakievich attempted to pursue the matter of repairs, but Petrovich would not hear him out and said: "Yes, I'll make you a new one by all means, you can rely on that, I'll really do my best. We can even follow the latest fashion, and fasten the collar with silver clasps under little flaps."

At this point Akaky Akakievich saw that there were no two ways about it: he would have to acquire a new coat. He became utterly dejected. How in fact was he going to pay for it—where would he find the money? Of course he could rely partly on the bonus he was due to receive for the holiday, but his money had long ago been accounted for and apportioned for other purposes. He needed new trousers, and had to pay the shoemaker a long outstanding bill for attaching new tops to his boots, he had to order three new shirts from the seamstress and two pairs of those undergarments which it is regarded indecent to mention on the printed page. In other words there would be nothing left of the money, and even if the director in a fit of generosity should give him forty-five or fifty instead of forty rubles he would still only be left with a trifling amount, a mere drop in the ocean of the price of a greatcoat. Although he knew that Petrovich had a habit of naming the most exorbitant prices, sometimes so high that even his wife would be unable to contain herself and exclaim: "What, are you out of your mind, you half-wit! Another time you'll take work on for nothing, and now you've taken some crazy notion to charge a price which you aren't even worth yourself." He knew, of course, that Petrovich would undertake to make the coat for eighty rubles, but still where was he going to get eighty rubles? He might have been able to get together half that sum;

maybe even a little more, but where would he get the other half?.. Before going any further we ought to explain that Akaky Akakievich had the habit of saving two kopecks from every ruble he spent, putting it away in a little locked box with a slot in the top for coins. At the end of every six months he would count up the accumulated sum of coppers and replace them with the equivalent in silver. He had maintained this practice for years, and by this time had accumulated a sum in excess of forty rubles. Thus he had half the sum at hand, but where was he to find the other half? Where was he to get another forty rubles? Akaky Akakievich racked his brains and decided that he would have to cut down on his day-to-day expenses, at the very least for one whole year: he would have to forgo his evening cup of tea, light no candles in the evening and if he had any work to do, to go into his landlady's room and do it by the light of her candle; when he walked he would have to tread more gently and carefully along the cobbles and flags, walking almost on tiptoes, so as to spare his shoeleather; he would have to have his laundry done as rarely as possible, and to prevent it wearing out would have to undress as soon as he got home and go about in only his cheap cotton dressing-gown, of extreme old age but spared by even the ravages of time. To tell the truth, at first he found it rather hard to accustom himself to such restrictions, but then he grew used to them and took them in his stride; he even became quite used to going entirely without food in the evenings; but then he derived spiritual nourishment, feeding off the dream of his new coat. With this new regime his whole existence seemed to become somehow more fulfilled, as if he had got married, as if there were some other person with him, as if he were not alone but some amiable companion had agreed to step down the rest of life's path with him—and this companion was none other that his heavy padded greatcoat, with its long-lasting and robust lining. He became somehow more alive, and stronger in character, like a man who has determined his goal in life. His face and behaviour lost their unsureness and indecision, that is, all their vacillating and vague features. At times his eyes would light up and the boldest and most daring thoughts would flit through his head: perhaps he would have that marten collar after all. His deliberations about this made him quite absent-minded, and one day during his copying he so nearly made a mistake

that he exclaimed "Lord!" almost out loud and crossed himself. At least once every month he would call in at Petrovich's shop to talk about the coat, asking what the best place was to buy cloth, which colour he should get, how much he should pay and would come home happy, if a little troubled, but content with the thought that soon the time would come when he could actually make the purchase and the coat would be ready. This moment arrived even sooner than he had expected. Contrary to all his expectations, the director awarded Akaky Akakievich a bonus of not forty, nor fortyfive, but all of sixty rubles: perhaps he had a premonition that Akaky Akakievich needed the coat very badly, or perhaps it just happened this way, but the upshot was that Akaky Akakievich was twenty rubles to the clear. This turn of events accelerated proceedings. After another two or three months of privation, Akaky Akakievich had the sum ready. His heart, normally so calm, started to pound. The very next day he set off with Petrovich to the shops. They bought a length of very fine cloth—and no wonder, for they had been thinking about this purchase for the last six months and nary a month had passed without them going round the shops to compare prices. Even Petrovich himself said that they would not find better cloth anywhere. They chose calico for the lining, but of such good quality and so firm that, in Petrovich's words, it was better than silk and even glossier and more impressive to look at. They decided against the marten because it was too dear, but instead chose the best cat skins they could find in the shops, cat skins that from afar would easily pass for marten. Petrovich worked at the coat for a full two weeks because there was a lot of quilting work to be done; otherwise it would have been finished sooner. Petrovich took twelve rubles for the work—it could not have been done for a kopeck less: everything was sewn with silk thread, with small-stitched double seams, and afterwards Petrovich worked over every seam with his very own teeth, pressing out various decorative shapes. The day when Petrovich finally brought the greatcoat ... it's hard to say with any exactitude what day it was, but it was probably the most memorable day in Akaky Akakievich's life. He brought it in the morning, early enough for Akaky Akakievich to wear it to work. The coat could not have been finished at a more opportune moment, for the hard frosts had just set in and the

weather was threatening to get colder still. Petrovich brought the coat himself, as befits a good tailor. The expression of solemnity on his face was such as Akaky Akakievich had never before seen. Seemingly, in his awareness of the greatness of his undertaking he had suddenly become conscious of the great chasm that divides tailors who merely sew in linings and do repairs from those who create new garments. He took the coat out of the handkerchief in which he had carried it; even the handkerchief was freshly laundered—he then folded it up and put it in his pocket for future use. Holding up the coat he regarded it with great pride and with a deft sweep of his hands threw it over Akaky Akakievich's shoulders, straightened it out, pulled it down at the back and finally draped it round Akaky Akakievich with its buttons undone. Akaky Akakievich, with the fussiness of middle age, was anxious to put it on properly and Petrovich helped him put his arms in the sleeves—and it sat well like that too. In other words, the coat proved to be a perfect fit. Petrovich did not miss the opportunity of saying that it was only because he lived on a small street and had no sign, and furthermore had known Akaky Akakievich for so long, that he had charged him so little; while on Nevsky Prospekt for the work alone he would have had to pay seventy-five rubles. Akaky Akakievich did not wish to discuss this point with Petrovich as he was afraid of the sound of large sums which Petrovich mentioned to stun his clients. He settled up with him, expressed his thanks and at once repaired to the department in his new greatcoat. Petrovich left with him and stood on the street for a long time watching the retreating coat, and then intentionally made a detour down a crooked side-street which brought him out further down the same street again where he had another look at his coat, but this time from a different aspect, that is, *en face.* Meanwhile Akaky Akakievich stepped along in as festive a mood as could be. Every minute and every second he was aware that he had on his shoulders his new greatcoat, and a couple of times he even chuckled for sheer pleasure. In actual fact the coat offered two advantages: one that it was warm, and the other that it looked well. He did not notice the road at all and suddenly found himself in the department; in the lobby he cast off the coat, examined it from all sides, and submitted it to the special surveillance of the porter. We do not know exactly how

everyone in the department learnt that Akaky Akakievich had a new coat and that the old smock was no more. They all dashed out into the lobby to look at their colleague's latest acquisition, and started congratulating him and wishing him well, so that at first Akaky Akakievich only smiled, and then started to feel a little embarrassed. When they all set upon him demanding that the happy event should be celebrated and that the least he could do was to give a party for them, Akaky Akakievich became thoroughly confused and did not know how on earth he was to get out of it. After several minutes of this he started naively assuring them, flushing deeply, that it was not a new coat at all, but in fact his old one. Finally one of the officials, with the high rank of assistant to a headclerk, announced, in order, probably, to show that he was not at all stuffy and prepared to associate even with his inferiors: "Be that as it may; I shall give the party instead of Akaky Akakievich and invite you all round to my place today for tea: by a lucky coincidence it is my birthday today." The officials at once congratulated the assistant headclerk and enthusiastically welcomed the invitation. Akaky Akakievich attempted to make his excuses, but they all said that this was bad manners, that he should be ashamed of himself, and there was nothing for it but to accept. Moreover he himself started to look forward to the party when he realised that it would give him an extra chance to show off his greatcoat, this time in the evening. The whole of this day was for Akaky Akakievich the most exciting holiday imaginable. He returned home in the best possible frame of mind, threw off his coat and hung it carefully on a hook, looked lovingly once again at the cloth and lining, and then got out his old smock, by now completely ragged, to compare them. As he looked at it he even laughed out loud: what an enormous difference! And for a long time after this, as he sat at his dinner, he chuckled whenever he thought of the appalling state of his old smock. He thoroughly enjoyed his dinner and afterwards did not do any copying, none at all, preferring instead in sybaritic fashion to lounge on his bed until it grew dark. Then, without further ado, he got dressed, donned his new coat and set out into the street. Where exactly the official lived who was giving the party I cannot unfortunately say: my memory is starting to let us down badly and everything in St. Petersburg, all its streets and buildings

have all become so jumbled around in my head that it is very hard to extract anything from it in proper shape. All that I do know for certain is that this official lived in the better part of town, that is, nowhere near Akaky Akakievich. At first Akaky Akakievich had to go down some deserted and dimly-lit streets but as he got nearer the official's flat the streets became more alive, more populated and better lit. There were more and more pedestrians, including ladies in elegant costume, men with beaver collars, and less and less cheap cabbies with their wooden-slatted sleighs, decked out with brass nails—their place was taken by dandies in crimson velvet caps, careering down the street in gleaming varnished sleighs draped in bearskins, and carriages with brightly painted boxes, their wheels creaking over the snow. Akaky Akakievich regarded all this with wonderment. It was several years since he had stepped out onto the street in the evening. He paused to examine with interest a picture in the brightly-lit window of a shop, which depicted a beautiful woman removing a shoe, and in the process exposing the whole length of her most shapely leg; whilst behind her a man with whiskers and a dapper imperial could be seen peeping through the doorway from another room. Akaky Akakievich shook his head and chuckled, then continued on his way. Perhaps he chuckled because he had beheld something quite unfamiliar, but of the sort which everyone nevertheless senses intuitively, or perhaps he was thinking, like many another official would in his place: "These Frenchmen!... You have to hand it to them, once they sort of get their mind on a thing they really sort of..." But on the other hand, maybe he was not thinking this at all—after all, you cannot see into the mind of another person and discover what he is thinking. He finally reached the house in which the assistant headclerk rented an apartment. The assistant headclerk lived in style: a lamp burned on the staircase, leading to the second-floor apartment. Entering the hall Akaky Akakievich saw rows of galoshes on the floor. In their midst, in the middle of the room, stood a samovar, which hissed and emitted puffs of steam. Hanging on the walls were masses of greatcoats and cloaks, some of which were even fitted out with beaver collars or velvet lapels. Through the wall he could hear a din of voices, which suddenly became clear and ringing when the door was opened and out walked a footman bearing a tray

set with emptied cups, a cream-jug and basket of biscuits. It was apparent that the officials had been gathered for some time, and had already drunk their first cup of tea. Akaky Akakievich, having hung up his coat himself, entered the room and was dazzled by the array of candles, officials, pipes and card-tables, and his ears rang with the confused clamour of voices conversing on all sides and the noise of chairs being shifted. He stood in the centre of the room feeling quite at a loss, looking around and trying to work out what he should do. But he had already been noticed, and was received with shouts of welcome, which were followed by a general stampede into the hall for another look at his new coat. Akaky Akakievich was perhaps a little abashed, but simple soul that he was, could not help delighting at the lavish praises bestowed on his great-coat. Then, of course, everyone abandoned both him and his coat and repaired, as was to be expected, to their tables, set out for whist. All this: the noise, chatter and numbers of people, was all quite novel to Akaky Akakievich. He simply did not know what to do with himself, where to put his hands, feet and all his person; finally he joined one of the tables, looked at the cards, stared at the faces of various of the players and after a little while started to yawn, feeling that all this was rather boring, and moreover that it was long past his bedtime. He tried to take his leave of his host, but the others would not let him, protesting that they simply had to drink a glass of champagne to celebrate the new purchase. An hour later dinner was served, consisting of mixed salad, cold veal, pâté, pastries and champagne. Akaky Akakievich was made to drink two glasses, after which he felt that it was altogether much jollier in the room, while he still could not forget that it was past twelve and long since time for him to be going home. Lest his host attempt somehow to detain him still further he slipped out of the room surreptitiously, hunted for his coat, which he observed with some distress lying on the floor, shook it out, picked all the fluff off it, threw it across his shoulders and descended the stairs into the street. It was still light outside. A few small shops of the sort that are always used as clubs by the servant classes and their ilk, were still open, while others, which had by then closed, cast long slivers of light through the chinks in their doors, which meant that they were not yet deserted, probably harbouring parlour maids or menservants, who would be

finishing off their evening's gossip, while their masters and mistresses remained totally mystified as to their whereabouts. Akaky Akakievich walked along feeling on top of the world, at one point almost breaking into a run, for no apparent reason, in pursuit of some lady who flitted past him like a flash of lightning, showing extraordinary mobility in every part of her body. However, he at once stopped and walked on at his previous gentle pace, himself amazed at this quite inexplicable burst of speed. Soon he entered those deserted streets, which by day are bleak enough places to walk, to say nothing of night time. At this hour they were even more dismal and deserted: the streetlamps became fewer and further between—oil was clearly in scarcer supply here; wooden houses and fences superseded brick and iron; not a soul was in sight; all the light came from the snow glinting on the street while the low huts slept glumly behind their dark shutters. By now he was near the point where the street entered an enormous square, a terrible empty wilderness, on the far side of which the buildings were barely visible.

In the far distance he could see shining the lamp of a sentry-booth, which appeared to stand on the very edge of the world. At this point Akaky Akakievich's good cheer noticeably deteriorated. He set forth across the square with unaccountable fear, as if with inner premonitions of something evil. He looked behind and about him: it was as though he were on the high seas. "No, better not to look," he thought and walked on with his eyes shut, and when he next opened them in order to see how far he was from the edge of the square he suddenly saw, standing right before his nose, some people with moustaches, although he was quite unable to make them out. His eyes clouded over and his heart began to pound. "Oi—that's my coat you're wearing!" exclaimed one of them in a threatening voice, seizing him by the collar. Akaky Akakievich was on the point of calling out for help when the other put his fist—the size of a civil servant's head—against his mouth and growled: "Just you try and shout!" After this Akaky Akakievich could only recall that they removed his coat, then one of them kneed him and he fell on his back in the snow and felt nothing more. A few minutes later he came round and rose to his feet, but by this time there was no one to be seen. He felt cold out in the open, and realising that his coat was gone started to call out,

but his voice was too feeble to carry across the square. In total despair, and shouting frantically, he set off at a run across the square heading directly for the booth. Next to this stood the duty constable, leaning on his halberd, and regarding Akaky Akakievich with curiosity, clearly wondering who the devil this was, running and shouting to him from afar. As he came up to him Akaky Akakievich, gasping for breath, started to rail at him for sleeping at his post and letting people be robbed under his very nose. The constable replied that he had not seen anything, that he had seen him being stopped by two people in the square and had assumed they were his friends; and that, instead of wasting his time shouting, he should go and see the sergeant the next day and the sergeant would find out who robbed him. Akaky Akakievich ran home in a terrible state; his hair, of which small tufts still remained on his temples and the back of his head, was completely dishevelled, his side and chest and his trousers were covered in snow. The old woman, his landlady, on hearing a fearful banging on the door, hastily sprang from her bed and wearing only one slipper ran to open the door, modestly holding her nightshirt across her bosom. On opening the door she stepped backwards in shock, seeing Akaky Akakievich in such a state. However, when she heard his story she clapped her hands and declared that he should go straight to the inspector, that the sergeant would tell all sorts of lies, make promises and do nothing about it; and that he would do best to go straight to the inspector, that he was even an acquaintance of hers, because Anna, the Finnish girl who used to work for her as a cook, was now in the inspector's employ as a nanny, that she often saw him passing their house, and also that he went to church every Sunday, cast cheerful looks about him while praying and consequently must be a kind man. On hearing this advice Akaky Akakievich went forlornly to his room, and as for the way he spent the night there, we shall leave that up to the imagination of the reader who can put himself in someone else's shoes. Early the following morning he set off to see the inspector; but there he was informed that the inspector was asleep; he came back at ten and once again was told that he was asleep; he came at eleven and was told that the inspector was not at home; he came at lunchtime but the clerks in the front room would not admit him until they had heard what his business was, what need he

had of the inspector and what had happened. For once in his life Akaky Akakievich showed a bit of character and said straight out that he had to see the inspector in person, that they had no right to refuse him admission, that he had come from the department on official business, and that if they were not careful he would file a complaint against them. This the clerks did not dare counter, and one of them went to call the inspector. But the inspector's reaction to the story about the robbery was really most extraordinary. Instead of turning his attention to the main point at issue he started asking Akaky Akakievich why he had been coming home so late, had he perhaps been visiting some disorderly house, with the result that Akaky Akakievich quite lost his composure and took his leave without even knowing whether the matter of the greatcoat would be looked into or not. The whole of this day he was absent from the office—the first such occasion in his life. The following day he turned up at work as pale as a ghost wearing his old smock, which had acquired an even more pathetic aspect. The tale of the robbery, although some officials had no compunction about laughing at Akaky Akakievich even at this sad juncture, touched many of them to the quick. They resolved at once to pass the hat around for him, but a completely trifling sum was collected because the department staff had already had to pay out a lot of money in contributions, first towards a portrait of the director, and then towards some new book, which their section head had recommended, being a friend of the author's. As a result they could only muster a paltry sum. One of their number, particularly moved with compassion, decided at least to help Akaky Akakievich with a piece of useful advice, and told him to go not to the police sergeant, because even though the sergeant, anxious to win the approval of his superiors, might just recover the coat somehow or other, the coat would still remain in the police station unless he could provide legal evidence of his ownership. Instead he should go and see a certain *important personage*, and that this *important personage* by sending notes and memorandums to the right people, would put things on the right track. Akaky Akakievich had no option but to go and see the *important personage*. Exactly what office was held by the important personage and what this entailed remains a mystery to this day. All that we can say is that the *important personage*

had only recently been made an important personage, and prior to that had been an unimportant personage. Furthermore his new office was not regarded as particularly important by comparison with those of certain other even more important personages. But then you will always find people who regard as important what is regarded as unimportant by others. Furthermore he endeavoured to augment his importance in all sorts of ways: namely, by directing that junior officials meet him on the staircase when he came to work; that no one dare come straight to see him, but that the following strict order be observed: the collegiate registrar make a report to the gubernia secretary, the gubernia secretary to the titular councillor, or whoever came next in seniority, and thus the matter would eventually reach him. For such is the pass to which holy Russia has come: imitation is the order of the day and everyone is busy aping their superiors. The story is even told of some titular councillor who, on being put in charge of some minor department, at once partitioned off a room of his own, calling it "head office" and posted beadles at the door in red collars and gold braid, who would step forward to open the door for any visitor, although the "head office" was barely big enough to accommodate an ordinary desk. The habits and methods of the important personage were appropriately grand and imposing, but in no way complicated. The cornerstone of his system was strictness. "Strictness, strictness and strictness" he was wont to say, and on pronouncing the last word would look most significantly into the face of his listener. Although in fact there was no reason for this because the dozen officials who made up the entire administrative mechanism of the office abided in a state of permanent fear anyway: on seeing their principal approaching from afar they would abandon what they were doing and stand at attention until he had passed through the room. His conversation with subordinates was marked by its strictness and consisted almost exclusively of three phrases: "how do you dare...? are you aware who you're talking to? do you realise who's standing before you?" For all that, he was a kind man at heart, companionable and obliging; but his head had been completely turned by his promotion. On receiving the rank of general he became quite confused and no longer knew how to conduct himself. When in the company of his equals he could be quite a decent chap and in many

respects even rather astute; but the moment he found himself in company with people even one rank below him he would be quite unable to cope: he would maintain a stony silence, and his position was all the more pitiable because he himself evidently felt that he could be spending the time in a much more enjoyable fashion. Sometimes his eyes expressed a strong desire to join in some interesting conversation or group, but he would be stayed by the thought: would this not be rather beneath his dignity, would it not be over-familiar and detract from his importance? After such considerations he always preserved his stony silence, only pronouncing the occasional monosyllable, and in this way acquired a reputation of a most tedious man. It was to this *important personage* that our Akaky Akakievich repaired, choosing a most unfavourable time, most unfortunate for Akaky Akakievich but fortunate for the important personage. The important personage was sitting in his office and conversing in the most cheerful fashion with an old acquaintance and childhood friend who had recently arrived in the capital, whom he had not seen for several years. Whilst thus engaged he was informed that one Bashmachkin had come to see him. He snapped: "Who is he?" and received the reply: "Some official."—"In that case let him wait, I've no time now," he said, at which point we should note that the important personage was telling a blatant lie: he had plenty of time, he and his friend had long ago covered all topics of interest and their conversation had degenerated into long silences punctuated by the occasional slap on one another's thigh and exclamation: "Well now, Ivan Abramovich!"—"So fancy that, Stepan Varlamovich!" Nevertheless he ordered the official to wait, in order to show his friend, a man who had long ago retired from service to his country home, how long officials were required to wait in his antechamber. Finally, when they had had their fill of talking, and still more of long silences, and had finished smoking their cigars in their extremely comfortable chairs with reclining backs, he suddenly pretended to remember something and said to his secretary who had stopped inside the door to take a report: "Um, there's some official out there, is there not? Tell him to come in." Observing Akaky Akakievich's downcast look and shabby old uniform he briskly swung round to face him and enquired: "What is it?" in a snappy hard voice, which he had carefully

cultivated behind locked doors, training in solitude in front of a mirror a week before receiving his promotion and his present position. Akaky Akakievich who had already been feeling appropriately awe-struck, somewhat lost his composure, and, in so far as his tongue-tied state would allow, explained with even more than his usual admixture of "sort-of's", that he had this brand new greatcoat, and he had been robbed in the most barbaric fashion, and that he was now turning to His Excellency, in order that through his intercession he might sort of get in touch with his honour the chief inspector of police, or someone else, and retrieve his coat. The general, for some obscure reason, regarded Akaky Akakievich's conduct as familiar. "Do you mean, my good man," he continued in the same sharp voice, "that you don't know the form? Do you know where you are? or how to conduct these matters properly? You should first have submitted a request about this to the office, it would have been passed to the headclerk, then to the department head, and then handed to the secretary and the secretary would have passed it on to myself..."

"But, Your Excellency," said Akaky Akakievich, striving to gather together all his meagre resources of courage, and at the same time breaking into a fearful sweat: "I have made so bold as to trouble Your Excellency because you see your secretaries ... are ... er ... an unreliable lot..."

"I beg your pardon?" said the important personage: "how dare you be so impudent? where on earth do you get such ideas from? what have the younger generation come to, treating their superiors with such mutinous impudence?!"

The important personage had apparently not noticed that Akaky Akakievich was already on the wrong side of fifty. Or perhaps he was assigning him to the younger generation in a relative sense, that is with relation to someone who was already the wrong side of seventy. "Are you aware who you're talking to? Do you realise who is standing before you? I'm asking you a question: do you hear me?" At this point he stamped his foot, and raised his voice to such a pitch that anyone, not only Akaky Akakievich, would have been quite terrified. Akaky Akakievich was paralyzed with terror, and lurched backwards, shaking from head to toe, quite unable to remain on his feet: if two attendants had not run up at that

point and supported him he would have fallen flat on his face. He was carried out almost unconscious. The important personage, delighted with the effect of his words, which had surpassed even his expectations, and quite intoxicated with the thought that his word alone could brighten a person out of his senses, gave his friend a sideways look to see how this was being received and noted not without gratification that his friend was in a most precarious state and was even beginning himself to show signs of fear.

How he got down the stairs and out into the street Akaky Akakievich was unable to recall. He could feel neither his legs nor his arms. In all his life he had never been given such a wigging by a general, let alone one from another department. Open-mouthed and constantly stumbling off the pavement he made his way through the snowstorm which was whistling down the street. The wind, as is customary in St. Petersburg, blew at him simultaneously from all sides, down all the streets and lanes. In no time he felt his chest tighten and when he dragged himself home he had completely lost his voice, and took to his bed with a swollen throat. Such is the effect a good dressing-down can have! The next day he was found to have a high fever. Thanks to the magnanimous assistance of the Petersburg climate the sickness took its course faster than was expected, and when eventually the doctor arrived and took his pulse he could only prescribe him a poultice, solely in order to ensure that the patient was not entirely deprived of the benefit of medicine, and thereupon declared that in a day and a half he would be kaputt. After which he turned to the landlady and said: "I'd advise you, my good woman, not to waste any time, and order him a pinewood coffin right away, because he won't be able to afford an oak one." We do not know whether Akaky Akakievich heard these fatal words, or, if he did, whether they made any impression on him, whether he was sorry to depart this wretched life, because all this time he remained in a high fever and state of delirium. He had hallucinations, each one stranger than the last: he would see Petrovich and order a new coat from him fitted with special traps for thieves, whom he was forever seeing under the bed, he kept calling for the landlady to remove a thief who had even got under the bedclothes; or he would ask why his old smock was hanging in front of him, that he had a new greatcoat; or he would fancy he

was standing in front of the general, receiving a thorough dressing-down and muttering: "Very sorry, Your Excellency", and finally he let forth such a torrent of foul and blasphemous curses that his good landlady even crossed herself, never before in her life having heard him pronounce anything like it, and all the more appalled because these words were preceded by an introductory: "Your Excellency". Later on he started to rant; it was only apparent that his jumbled speech and thoughts were all centred on the ill-fated greatcoat. Finally poor Akaky Akakievich breathed his last. They did not bother to seal up either his room or his possessions, firstly because there were no heirs, and secondly because he left very little behind him, namely: a bunch of goose-feathers, a quire of white office paper, three pairs of socks, two or three buttons which had come off his trousers, and the old smock already familiar to the reader. Who got it all God only knows: and I must confess that the present narrator of this story has made no attempt to find out. His corpse was carried out and laid in its grave, and St. Petersburg continued its life without Akaky Akakievich just as if he had never existed. No trace remained of this creature protected by no one, dear to no one, of interest to no one, not even attracting the attention of the naturalist who will eagerly seize the opportunity of putting a common housefly on a pin and studying it through a microscope; a creature who had endured with humility the jeers of his fellow-clerks and had gone to his grave without any great achievement to his name, but whose wretched life had nevertheless been brightened for one brief moment so shortly before its end by a radiant visitation in the form of a new greatcoat, but who had then been destroyed by an intolerable blow of misfortune, as crushing as those suffered by the lords and sovereigns of this world... A few days after his death the watchman from his department was sent to his flat with instructions that he should come to work forthwith: such was the director's command; but the watchman was forced to return without him, reporting that he would not come to work any more, and when asked "Why not?" replying: "Well he's dead, see, and they buried him three days ago." Thus did they find out about Akaky Akakievich's death in the department and the very next day his place was occupied by another clerk, much taller than his late predecessor, and copying his letters in a hand quite unlike Akaky

Akakievich's upright ciphers, sloping heavily to one side.

But you will be most surprised to learn that this is not the end of Akaky Akakievich's story, that he was fated to live on after his death for a few spectacular days, as if by way of compensation for his insipid life. It so happens that our bleak story had an unexpected and fantastic ending. Rumours suddenly started to circulate round St. Petersburg that by Kalinkin Bridge and far beyond it a ghost had been seen at night. This ghost had the guise of an official searching for some stolen greatcoat and went about rending from the shoulders of all and sundry, regardless of rank and title, their coats to replace his own: coats with catfur and beaver linings, quilted coats, racoon, fox and bearskin coats, in other words coats of every manner of fur and skin ever employed by people to cover their own skin. One of the department officials saw the ghost himself and at once recognized Akaky Akakievich, but this struck such fear into his heart that he turned tail and fled and thus failed to get a good look at him, and only saw him wag a threatening finger at him from afar. Complaints came pouring in that the backs and shoulders of citizens—not only titular councillors but even privy councillors—had been subjected to the rigours of the nocturnal frost as a result of losing their coats to this ghostly marauder. The police put out an order to detain the ghost, at whatever cost, alive or dead, and to punish him, as an example for others, in the severest fashion, and they were very nearly successful in carrying out this directive. A police constable on the beat in Kiryushkin Street actually caught the dead culprit by the scruff of his neck at the very scene of his crime, as he attempted to wrest a worsted overcoat from the back of some retired musician who in his time had played the flute. Seizing him by the collar he shouted for two colleagues, whom he instructed to hold the ghost while he swiftly reached into his boot for his snuff-box intending to reanimate his chronically frozen nose, however the snuff was evidently so potent that even a dead man could not take it. No sooner had the constable closed his right nostril with a finger and sniffed a liberal pinch up the other than the dead man emitted such a sneeze that all three of them were temporarily blinded by the spray. In the space of time it took them to raise their hands to wipe their eyes there was no trace of the dead man, and they could not even say with certainty whether they

ever had him in their hands at all. After that the constables became so fearful of dead men that they were even wary of laying hands on the living, and would shout from a distance: "Hey you, move along now!" The dead official even started to appear beyond Kalinkin Bridge, striking fear into the hearts of all timid people. But we have quite forgotten about the *important personage*, who in a sense was the real cause of this fantastic twist to our, incidentally, entirely authentic story. Our devotion to the truth requires us to say that this important personage; shortly after the departure of poor, thoroughly dressed-down Akaky Akakievich, felt something in the nature of regret. Compassion was not an entirely alien emotion to him; his heart was affected by many kind stirrings, for all that his rank usually prevented him from revealing them. As soon as his visiting friend had taken his leave his thoughts returned to poor Akaky Akakievich. And after that almost every day he would see in his mind's eye the pale countenance of Akaky Akakievich, crumbling under his thorough dressing-down. He became so disturbed by these visions that a week later he even decided to send an official to Akaky Akakievich to find out what the trouble was, and whether it would not after all be possible to help him. When they reported back that Akaky Akakievich had suddenly been carried off by a fever he was quite shocked, hearing the reproaches of his conscience, and remained out of sorts for the whole of that day. Wishing to distract himself somehow or other and put this unpleasant news out of his mind he set off to spend the evening with a friend, in whose house he would be sure to find decent company, and best of all, where almost everyone held the same rank, so that he did not feel trammelled in any way. This had a remarkable effect on his state of mind. He became quite relaxed, conversed in the most agreeable manner, was amiable to all and, in a word, thoroughly enjoyed the evening. He drank a couple of glasses of champagne at dinner, a well-known means of restoring good humour. The champagne put him in a pranksome mood and he decided not to go home yet but to visit a lady of his acquaintance called Karolina Ivanovna, of supposedly German origins, towards whom he entertained the friendliest relations. We should point out here that the important personage was no longer a young man, a good husband to his wife and father to his children. His two sons, one of whom was already

in the civil service and his attractive sixteen-year-old daughter with her slightly snubbed but pretty nose would come to him every day to kiss his hand, saying: "Bonjour, papa." His spouse, a lady of presentable mien, and even not at all unattractive, would first give him her hand to kiss and then turn it over and kiss his hand. But the important personage, while thoroughly content with these domestic family endearments thought it not unethical to cultivate a friendly relationship with a lady in another part of town. This lady acquaintance was no prettier or younger than his wife; but such puzzling things occur in this world and it is not our job to pass judgement on them. Thus, the important personage descended the stairs, seated himself in his sleigh and bade the coachman: "To Karolina Ivanovna's", while he himself wrapped himself luxuriously in his warm greatcoat, and remained in that state so cherished by the average Russian, when he himself does not have to think for the thoughts come into his head of their own will, each one more pleasing than the last, and requiring no exhausting pursuit. Replete with contentment, he cast his mind back over all the amusing moments of the dinner party, all the witticisms which had aroused laughter in his small circle; many of these he even repeated to himself *sotto voce* and discovered that they were quite as funny as before and thus we shall not be surprised to learn that he himself laughed out loud. However, his pleasure was occasionally marred by a gust of wind, which would spring up God knows from where or for which reason, and whipped his face, lashing it with pellets of snow, flapping the collar of his coat like a canvas sail, or suddenly blowing the shoulder-flap with a quite unnatural force over his head and causing him no end of bother to extricate himself. Suddenly the important personage felt himself being seized firmly by the collar. Turning round he perceived a small man in an old, worn-out uniform, and was not a little horrified to recognize Akaky Akakievich. The old official's face was as white as snow, and he looked exactly like a corpse. But the horror of the important personage passed all bounds when he saw the dead man's mouth contort, and, exhaling a terrible smell of the grave, utter the following words: "Aha! so there you are! At last I've got you by the scruff of the neck! It's your greatcoat I'm after ! You didn't want to help me and even gave me a dressing-down so now you can hand over your

coat!" The wretched important personage almost died. For all his great strength of character in the office and in general with those of inferior rank, and for all his manly figure and appearance, on beholding which people would exclaim: "Goodness, what character!" at the present moment he, like a lot of people endowed with heroic appearances, felt such terror that he even feared he might suffer a morbific seizure. He threw off his coat as quickly as he could and called to the driver in an unnatural voice: "Turn home, and make it fast!" The driver, hearing that tone of voice that is usually employed in decisive moments and is usually accompanied by something far more emphatic, took the precaution of hunching his shoulders, cracked his whip and they shot forward like an arrow from a bow. In about six minutes the important personage was already at the entrance to his house. Pale, in a state of shock and coatless, he had driven home, abandoning his plan of going to Karolina Ivanovna's. Somehow or other he staggered to his room and spent the night in a state of such great agitation, that the following morning his daugher told him flatly: "Papa, today you are quite pale." But papa held his tongue and said not a word to anyone about what had happened, where he had been and where he was planning to go. This adventure had the most pronounced effect on him. He even stopped saying so often to his inferiors: "How dare you—do you realise who you're speaking to?" and if he did say it, it was not without first listening to what the other had to say. But the most remarkable fact of all was the total disappearance of the official's ghost after this date: it was clear that the general's greatcoat was just what he wanted: at any rate no more stories were told of people having their coats torn from their backs. However, many busy-bodies were unable to calm down and claimed that the official was still appearing in outlying areas of the city. And it is quite true that a constable in the Kolomna district with his own eyes saw a ghost appear from behind a building; but the constable was by nature such a feeble man that he was once knocked off his feet by an ordinary young pig which came hurtling out of some private house, to the great hilarity of the cabbies standing nearby, for which insolence he fined them a kopeck each, using the money to buy snuff. This same weakling of a constable did not have the courage to stop him and instead followed him in the darkness until the ghost

suddenly stopped, swung round and asked: "What do you want?" exhibiting such a fist as you would see on no living man. The constable replied "Nothing", and beat a smart retreat. However, this ghost was much taller, with the most enormous moustaches, and heading off in the direction of the Obukhov Bridge, was soon lost in the darkness.

1841

DIARY OF A MADMAN

October 3

Today the most extraordinary thing happened to me. I rose rather late this morning, and when Mavra brought me my polished boots I asked her what the time was. Learning that ten o'clock had long since struck I dressed with great haste. I must confess I almost did not bother to go to the department at all, knowing in advance what a sour face our section head would make. As it is he has been saying to me for ages: "What's the matter with you, man, have you gone soft in the head? Sometimes you dash around so wildly and get your work into such a tangle that Satan himself couldn't sort it out, with small letters at the beginning of sentences, and no date or number at the head." Damn him, the old crow! I suppose he's jealous of me sitting in the director's office and sharpening H.E.'s pens. As I was saying, I wouldn't have gone to work if it hadn't been for the chance of seeing the treasurer and squeezing an advance on my salary out of the old jew. He's another one for you! You won't catch him giving anyone money a month in advance—good God no, not until kingdom come. You ask him, plead until you're blue in the face, but he won't give in, the old Shylock, not even if you were starving. But at home his own cook slaps his face. Everyone knows that. I don't see the advantage of serving in the department. The job has nothing to offer. Now it's quite a different story in the gubernia administration and the civil and treasury chambers: take one of those chaps hunched in his corner and scribbling away. He might be wearing the most revolting old tailcoat

and with a mug that would turn your stomach, but just look at the country villa he rents! Don't try softening him with a gilt porcelain tea-cup: "That," he will say, "is a present for a doctor"; he won't accept anything less than a pair of trotters, or a droshky or a three-hundred ruble beaver coat. He may look the retiring type, with such a gentle turn of phrase: "Could I trouble you for the loan of your knife to sharpen a pen?" he'll ask, and the next moment he'll fleece some petitioner so thoroughly that all the wretched fellow has left are the clothes on his back. Admittedly, in our department we perform a noble service, and the place is kept spick and span in a way the gubernia administration would never dream of in a million years: with mahogany desks and all of us treated politely by our superiors. Yes, I must say that if it weren't for the nobility of the job I would have left the department long ago.

I put on my old coat and took an umbrella, because it was pouring with rain. There was no one on the streets, except for a few old women sheltering beneath the skirts of their coats, Russian merchants bearing umbrellas, and the odd coachman. Of the noble elements of the human race I could see only one specimen, a fellow official weaving his way along. I saw him at the crossroads, and at once said to myself: Aha! Oh no, my good man, I know you, you're not on your way to the department, you're chasing after that young lady tripping along there, and looking at her pretty little ankles. What a creature he is, our fellow civil servant! I swear to God, he is a match for any officer, let some pretty young miss walk past in her bonnet and he will be sure to latch on to her. While I was thinking this I saw a carriage drive up to the shop I was walking past at that moment. I at once recognized it: it was our director's carriage. But he had no reason to be calling at a shop and I decided that it must be his daughter, and not him. I pressed up against the wall. A footman opened the carriage door and she flitted forth like a little bird. She glanced right and left, her eyebrows trembled, her eyelashes fluttered... Dear God above! I thought, I've had it now, I've really had it. But why did she have to drive out in such a rainstorm? Try and say now that women aren't a little funny in the head about clothes. She did not recognize me, and I tried to conceal myself deeper in the folds of my coat, because the coat was covered with stains and furthermore of an extremely old-fashioned cut. Nowadays

people wear cloaks with tall collars while mine had several collars one on top of the other, and all of them short, and the cloth was of very inferior quality. Her little dog was not quick enough to slip through the shop door and remained on the pavement. I know this little dog: it is called Madgy. I had not waited there a full minute before I suddenly heard a squeaky little voice say: "Why, hello Madgy!" So fancy that! Who could it be? I peeked round and glimpsed two ladies walking beneath an umbrella: one of them old, the other young; but as soon as they passed I heard a voice beside me say: "Shame on you, Madgy!" What the devil was going on? And then I saw Madgy being sniffed by another little dog, which was trotting along behind the ladies. Well! I said to myself, enough of this nonsense, surely I'm not drunk? But it is a rare thing for me to get drunk. "No, Fidèle, you're wrong to think that," I could see Madgy saying, "I was, woof, woof! I was—woof, woof! very sick." Fancy a doggie talking like that! I must confess I was very surprised to hear it. But afterwards, when I had thought it all out properly, I stopped being surprised. There have been lots of similar cases in the world already. They say that a fish swam onto a beach in England and said two words in such a strange language that scholars have been racking their brains for the last three years and still haven't decided what they mean. I also read in the papers about two cows which came into a shop and asked for a pound of tea. But I must admit I was much more surprised when I heard Madgy say: "I wrote to you, Fidèle; Polkan obviously didn't deliver my letter!" I swear—I'd stake my salary on it!—never in my life have I heard of dogs being able to write. Only gentlefolk know how to write properly. There are of course a few shop-assistants and even the occasional serf who can copy things, but their writing is largely mechanical: without commas, full-stops or any sort of style.

This really amazed me. I must confess that of late I have started to hear and see things that no one before has ever seen or heard. I know what, I said to myself, I'll follow this dog and find out who she is and what she is up to.

I unfurled my umbrella and set off in pursuit of the two ladies. We crossed over to Gorokhovaya Street, turned onto Meshchanskaya, from there made our way to Stolyarnaya and finally came out at the Kokushkin Bridge and halted in front of

a large house. I know this house, I said to myself. It's the Zverkovs' house. What an establishment! The number of people living in that place; all those cooks, provincials—and as for our fellow clerks, they're packed in there like dogs. I even have a friend amongst them, who plays the trumpet rather well. The ladies ascended to the fifth floor. Very well, I thought: I shall go no further now, but make a note of the place and will be sure at the first opportunity to avail myself of it.

October 4

Today is Wednesday, and consequently I was called into the director's office. I intentionally arrived a little early and sitting down to work soon sharpened all his pens. Our director must be a very wise man. All the walls of his office are covered with book-cases. I read the titles of a few of the books: such fearful learning, way above the head of our fellow civil servant. They were all either in French or in German. Take a look at him and you will be amazed at the glow of importance shining from his eyes! I've never yet heard him pronounce a superfluous word. Only when you're handing in some document he might ask: "What's it like outside?" "Damp, your excellency!" Yes, he's a cut above your average clerk all right! A man of state. I've noticed however, that he is particularly fond of me. If only the same were true of his daughter... Phew! what a thought... Never mind, say no more!—Read the *Bee*. Stupid lot, these French. What do they want anyway? The whole lot of them should be flogged, if you ask me! I read an extremely pleasing description of a ball, rendered by a Kursk landowner, in the same number. Kursk landowners have a knack with words. After this I noticed that it was already half past twelve, and his lordship had not yet emerged from his bedroom. But around half past one an event took place which cannot be described by any pen. The door opened and I thought it was the director, and leapt to my feet with my papers; but it was her, her young ladyship! Holy fathers, you should have seen how she was dressed! She wore a dress as white as a swan: such a splendid dress! and her eyes sparkled like the sun, I swear, just like the sun! She bowed and said: "Hasn't papa come yet?" Aiee, what a voice! As sweet as a canary's. Your Excellency, I was on the point of saying, do not

have me put to death, but if it is your will, let me be executed by your dainty sovereign hand. But, dammit, my tongue stuck to my palate and all I could get out was: "no ma'am". She looked at me, at the books and dropped her handkerchief. I flung myself at it, slipped on the cursed parquet floor and almost squashed my nose, but managed to keep any footing and recovered her handkerchief. Saints above, what a handkerchief! The very finest cambric—a mere shadow of cloth! and positively exuding generalship. She thanked me, with a slight smile barely touching her sweet little lips, and after this was gone. I sat there for another hour, until suddenly a footman came in and said: "You may go home, Aksenty Ivanovich, the master has already left the house." I can't stand the footman type: always slouching about hallways and never bothering so much as to nod their heads. And that's only a part of it: once one of these rascals even had the presumption to offer me, without even rising from his seat, some of his snuff. I will have you know, you stupid peasant, that I am an official, I am of noble extraction. However, I took my hat and put on my coat myself, because these characters will never hold it for you, and departed. Most of the day I spent at home lying down. Then I copied down some very good verses: "My sweetheart an hour I saw not, And thought a whole year had gone by; And thus was my life made sheer torment, No more shall I live, I did sigh." By Pushkin, I should think. Towards evening, wrapping myself up in my coat I went to H.E.'s driveway and hung about for a long time in the hope of seeing her come out to enter her carriage, that I might have another look at her—but no, she did not emerge.

November 6

The section head really made me mad. When I came to work he summoned me and started speaking to me like this: "Well, what exactly do you think you're playing at?"—"What do you mean? I'm not playing at anything," I answered.—"Now listen here: you're over forty now, you know—time you had your wits about you. What do you think you're up to? Do you imagine I don't know about all your goings-on? Fancy chasing around after the director's daughter! Now just take a look at yourself, and ask yourself who you

think you are? You're nothing, less than nothing. Your mind isn't worth a brass farthing. Just take a look in the mirror at your face—where do you think you'll get with a mug like that!" Damned nerve, when you think that he has a face like an apothecary's retort with a tuft of hair on top, combed upwards into a wave and pasted into a kind of rosette, so he thinks he alone can do what he likes. I know, I know why he's angry with me. He's envious; he probably saw the signs of favour manifested in my direction. Well I spit on him! As if it's such a great deal to be an aulic councillor! fix a gold chain to your watch, order a thirty-ruble pair of boots—what the hell does he think? Am I descended from some half-educated plebeian, or tailor, or under-officer? I'm a member of the gentry. I may yet rise high in the service. I'm only forty-two—the age at which your service really starts. Just you wait, my friend! we'll be a colonel yet, and who knows, God willing, perhaps something even a little higher, and we'll earn ourselves a better reputation than yours. What's this idea that no one can hold a candle to you? Just give me a tailcoat tailored in the latest fashion by Rutsch and a cravat like yours and you won't be a patch on me. I just haven't got the funds, that's the trouble.

November 8

Went to the theatre. Saw a play about the Russian fool Filatka. I had a good laugh. There was also some farce with comic poems about lawyers in general, and a certain collegiate registrar in particular. Such free language that I was surprised they got past the censor: they said about merchants that they cheat people, that their sons are debauched and try to worm their way into the upper classes. There was a very witty couplet about journalists too: that they like to abuse everything and everyone, and the author seeks the audience's protection. Modern authors write some dashed amusing plays. I love going to the theatre. As soon as I've got a few kopecks in my pocket, off I go, and nothing will stop me. And on the whole your average clerk is a real boor: nothing will drag him to the theatre, unless you give him a free ticket. There was very nice singing by an actress. It reminded me of her...eh, damn it! .. never mind, say no more.

November 9

At eight o'clock I set off for the department. The section head pretended he had not seen me come in at all. I also behaved as though nothing had passed between us. I looked over and checked some papers. Went home at four, walking past the director's residence, but could not see anyone. Spent most of the time after dinner lying on my bed.

November 11

Today I sat in the office of our director, sharpened twenty-three pens for him and four pens for her—ai, ai!... for Her Excellency. He always likes to have a lot of pens standing ready. Phew! The mind that man must have! Doesn't say a thing, but I reckon he's sifting through it all in his head. If only I could know what he was thinking about, what was brewing in that skull of his. I would like to have a closer look at the way these gentlefolk live, watch all their little niceties and aristocratic goings-on, see the way they behave in their own circle—that's what I'd like to know! On several occasions I've considered starting a conversation on the subject with H.E., but, damn it all, my tongue simply will not obey me: I can only get it to say whether it's warm or cold outside and nothing more. I'd like to peek into their drawing room, where sometimes you can see an open door leading into yet another room. Ech, the richness, the finery! The china and the mirrors! I'd like to have a look in there, in Her Excellency's half of the house, that's what I'd like! I'd sneak into the boudoir, where she has all her little pots and phials, and such exquisite flowers that you're even afraid to breathe on them, see her dress lying there, so ethereal it is more like air than a dress. Oh, for a look into the bedroom.... In there I reckon you will see something truly wondrous, you will find paradise such as you will not find even in heaven. You would see the little stool on which she places her dainty foot as she alights from her bed, see her drawing on her snow-white stocking... aiyee! Never mind, ... say no more.

Today for some reason I suddenly remembered the conversation between those two dogs which I heard on Nevsky Prospekt. Very well, I thought to myself, now I'll find out every-

thing. I must intercept the correspondence which those good-for-nothing dogs are conducting with one another. I would be bound to find something out there. I must admit once I even called Madgy over and said to her: "Listen Madgy, we're on our own now, and if you like I'll lock the door so no one will be able to see us, so why don't you tell me everything you know about your miss, what she's like and so on? I swear to you I'll not let anyone in." But the sly little bitch put her tail between her legs, cringed and slunk out of the door as if she had heard nothing. I've long suspected that dogs are far more intelligent than people; I was even convinced that they are able to speak but are only prevented from doing so by their great stubbornness. They are extraordinary schemers, and notice everything, every move people make. No, I don't care what happens, tomorrow I'm going to the Zverkovs' house and will ask Fidèle a few questions and, if I can, I'll get hold of all the letters she's received from Madgy.

November 12

Set off at two o'clock p.m. to see Fidèle and put a few questions to her. I cannot stand cabbage, and there is a stink of cabbage wafting from all the shops along Meshchanskaya; in addition there's such an infernal stench seeping from under the door of every house that I had to hold my nose and run at full speed. To make things worse the uncouth craftsmen produce such a mass of soot and smoke in their workshops that it is quite impossible for any respectable person to promenade here. When I climbed to the sixth floor and rang the door-bell a young girl came out, quite pretty and with little freckles. I recognized her to be the girl who was walking with the old lady. She blushed slightly and I at once caught on: aha, I thought, my darling, you want a husband. "What can I do for you?" she asked. "I want to talk to your dog." Such a stupid girl! I could see at once that she was stupid. Meanwhile the dog ran up barking, I tried to grab it but the evil little beast almost sank its teeth in my nose. However I espied its bed in the corner. That, I thought, is just what I'm looking for. I stepped over to it, rummaged in the straw and to my own great delight pulled out a small bundle of little pieces of paper. The nasty little brute, on seeing this, first bit me on the calf and

then, when it sniffed that I had taken the letters, started whining and fawning, but I said: "Oh no, my beauty, goodbye!" and set off at a run. I think the girl must have thought me quite mad because she was extremely alarmed. On arriving home I wanted to get down to work right away and study these letters, because I find it rather hard to see by candle-light. But as ill luck would have it, Mavra had decided to scrub the floor. These stupid Finns all have a ridiculous obsession with cleanliness. So instead I went for a stroll and to ponder over all these events. Now, at long last, I will find out about everything, all they do and think, what makes them tick, and will get to the very bottom of things. These letters will tell me everything. Dogs are a smart crowd, they know all the political ins and outs and so I can be sure I'll find everything there, including a true picture of this man and of all his doings. They'll also contain something about her who... Never mind, say no more! I got home towards evening. Most of the rest of the day I spent lying on my bed.

November 13

Well now, let's have a look: the letters are fairly clearly written. However there's something distinctly doggy in the handwriting. I'll read it out:

"Dear Fidèle! I simply cannot get used to your pretentious name. You'd think they could have given you something a bit better! Fidèle, Rosa—such mauvais ton, but that is neither here nor there. I am very glad that we had the idea of writing to one another."

The letter was written most correctly. All the spelling and punctuation was correct, and even our department head couldn't write like that, for all that he claims to have been to some university. Let's look on:

"It seems to me that it is one of life's greatest blessings to share one's thoughts, feelings and impressions with another soul."

Hmm! an idea lifted from a book translated from the German. Don't remember the title.

"I'm saying this from experience, although I've seen no more of the world than the gates of our house. But do not think that my life does not brim with joy. My mistress, whom her papa calls Sophie, loves me to distraction."

Aiyee!.. Never mind, say no more.

"Papa also often pets me. I drink tea and coffee with cream. Ah, ma chère, I must confess to you that I can see absolutely no pleasure in the big, gnawed bones which our Polkan slavers over in the kitchen. Bones are only nice if they are from game-birds, and then only if no one has already sucked out the marrow. Another thing I like is a mixture of several sauces, but without capers and parsley; but I can't think of anything worse than the custom of giving dogs little pellets of bread. You get some visiting squire, who has been holding all sorts of rubbish in his hands, rolling these little balls of bread, then calling you over and thrusting them between your teeth. It seems impolite to refuse, so you have to eat them; revolting they may be, but eat them you must..."

What the hell is all this? What a lot of tripe! As if she had nothing better to write about. Let's look at another page. Maybe it'll be more informative.

"I should be most willing to inform you of all the happenings in our house. I have already told you something about the main gentleman whom Sophie calls papa. He is an extremely strange man."

Aha! Here we are at last! I knew it: they have a political outlook on everything. Let's see what she has to say about papa:

"...an extremely strange man. Most of the time he remains silent. He very rarely speaks; but last week he kept on talking to himself, asking: 'Will I get it or not?' He picks up a piece of paper in one hand, clenches the other one and asks: 'Will I get it or not?' Once he turned to me and asked me: 'What do you think, Madgy? will I get it or not?' I could not understand a thing, so I merely sniffed his boot and walked away. Then, ma chère, papa came home a week later overjoyed about something. All that morning gentlemen in uniforms came to see him and congratulated him on something. At table papa was in

better spirits than I've ever seen him before, telling jokes, and after dinner he lifted me up to his neck and said: 'Look at that, Madgy, what do you think that is?' I saw some ribbon. I sniffed it, but could not discern any interesting smell at all; then, stealthily, I licked it: it was slightly salty."

Hm! If you ask me this dog has got out of hand ... it should be whipped! And talk about vanity! I must take account of that.

"Farewell, ma chère! I must run and so on ... and so forth... I'll finish this letter tomorrow. Well, hello again! I'm back with you once more. Today my mistress Sophie..."

Aha! now we'll find out about Sophie. Damn it all!... Never mind ... let's carry on.

"...my mistress Sophie was in a fearful flap. She was getting ready to go to a ball and I was delighted to have the chance in her absence of writing to you. My Sophie is always terribly glad to go to balls, although she almost always gets angry while she's dressing. I can never understand the pleasure, ma chère, in going to these balls. Sophie returns from them at 6 in the morning, and I can always tell from her pale and haggard look that the poor thing hasn't been given anything to eat. I must admit I would never be able to live like that myself. Now if I had to go without my grouse in wine sauce, or roast chicken wings I ... well, I don't know what I would do. I also like gravy and wheatmeal. But as for carrots, or turnips, or artichokes, I can never eat them..."

Extraordinarily uneven style. You can see at once that it's not the work of a human being. She begins properly but ends with all this dog rubbish. Let's take a look at another letter. A good long one. Hmm! without the date.

"Ah! my dear, how one can feel the approach of spring. My heart is already beating in expectation of something. There is a merry ringing in my ears. So that I often just stand for minutes on end with one paw raised, looking at the door. I'll tell you a secret: I have a lot of admirers. I often sit on the window-sill and watch them. Goodness, if you knew what monsters there are amongst them. There is this terribly coarse mongrel, fearfully stupid, with stupidity written all over his face, strutting pompously along the street and imagining that

he's some great noble and that is how everyone else sees him. Not a bit of it. I didn't even pay any attention to him, acting as if I hadn't seen him. And as for the fearsome mastiff that stopped in front of my window! If he had stood on his hind legs—something I don't suppose he can do, the oaf, he would have towered a head and shoulders above my Sophie's papa, who is also fairly tall, and fat with it. That boor of a mastiff must be shockingly impudent. I growled at him, but did he turn a hair? Didn't even bat an eyelid! Instead he stuck out his tongue, drooped his enormous ears and looked into the window—what a peasant! But I hope you don't think, ma chère, that my heart is indifferent to all assailants—oh no... I wish you could have seen one cavalier called Tresor, who climbed through the fence of the house next door. Ah, ma chère, you should have seen his handsome muzzle!"

Pshaw!.. What rubbish!.. How can you fill a letter with such idiocy. Let me have a human being! I want to see a human being; I want the sustenance which would nourish and delight my soul and instead I must feed it such nonsense. Let's skip a page and maybe we'll turn up something better:

"... Sophie was sitting at the little table and sewing something. I looked out of the window because I like watching the passers-by. When suddenly the footman came in and announced: 'Mr. Teplov!' 'Ask him in,' called Sophie and rushed to embrace me. 'Oooh Madgy, Madgy! If only you knew who this is: dark-haired, an Equerry, and such gorgeous eyes! black and sparkling.' And Sophie ran off into her room. A minute later the young Equerry entered, with black whiskers; he stepped up to the mirror, gave a pat to his hair and examined the room. I gave a little growl and went back to the window. Sophie soon emerged and dropped a merry curtsey to his shuffling bow, while I behaved as if I noticed nothing, and continued to stare out of the window; however I kept my head tilted a little to one side and tried to listen to what they were talking about. And, ma chère, if you could have heard the rubbish they were talking! They were discussing how some lady at a dance, instead of dancing one figure danced another; and also that some Bobov looked just like a stork with his frilly shirt, and almost fell on his nose; that some Lidina imagines that she has blue eyes, when in actual fact her eyes are

green—and so on. Lord, I thought to myself, imagine if you compared the Equerry with Tresor. Heavens above! What a difference! For a start the Equerry has a completely smooth, broad face, framed by whiskers, as if he had tied a black cloth around his mug, while Tresor has a slender nose, with a white flash on his brow. Nor is there any comparison between the Equerry's figure and Tresor's. His eyes, habits, and manner are also all wrong. Dear me, what a difference! I can't think what she sees in her Equerry. Why does she admire him so?..."

It seems to me as well that something is wrong here. That Equerry cannot have turned her head like that. Let's read on:

"I'm afraid that if she likes the Equerry she'll soon start liking that clerk who sits in papa's office. Oh, ma chère, if only you could see that monster. Just like a tortoise in an old sack..."

I wonder what clerk that is?

"He has the strangest name. He's always sitting there sharpening pens. The hair on his head is just like straw. Papa always sends him instead of his servant..."

I have a feeling that runt of a dog is referring to me. Where's this hair that looks like straw?

"Sophie simply cannot stop herself laughing when she looks at him."

You're lying, you horrible little dog! What a foul tongue: As if I didn't know that it's all out of pure envy. As if I didn't know whose work all this is. It's the doing of the section head. For the man has taken a vow of irreconcilable hatred to me, and he does his damnedest to spite me at every step. Still, let's take a look at one more letter. Maybe it'll reveal what he's up to.

"Ma chère Fidèle, you must forgive me for not having written for so long. I was in a state of sheer ecstasy. It's perfectly true what some writer said, that love is a second lease of life. In addition there are big changes taking place in our house. The Equerry calls round every day. Sophie is out of her mind about him. Papa is in top spirits. I even heard our Grigory saying, you know, the sweeper who talks to himself,

that there would be a wedding soon, because papa is determined to see Sophie marry either a general, or an Equerry, or an army colonel..."

What the devil! I can't read on... You have all the luck if you're either an Equerry or a general. All the best things in life, they all go to the Equerries or the generals. You find yourself a miserable piece of good fortune, and as soon as you stretch out your hand—along comes an Equerry or general to snatch it away. Damn it all! I would like to be a general myself, and not in order that I could marry her and so on. No; I would like to be a general merely in order to see how they would fawn on me with all their la-di-da airs and graces, and then tell them that I spit on the pair of them. Damnation. How vexing! I tore the stupid pug's letters into tiny pieces.

December 3

It can't be true! They're lying! There can't be a wedding! So what, if he is an Equerry. After all that's no more than a rank; it isn't something you can see, or you can hold in your hand. The fact you're an Equerry doesn't mean you get a third eye in the middle of your forehead. It's not as if his nose is made of gold: it's no different from mine or anyone else's; like anyone else he uses it for sniffing, and not eating, for sneezing and not coughing. On several occasions already I've tried to work out the cause of these distinctions. Why am I a titular councillor and what is the point of my being a titular counsillor? Maybe in fact I'm a count or general, and only appear to be a titular councillor? Maybe I don't know myself who I am. After all, there are so many examples in history: you get some simple chap, not by any means of gentle birth, but a simple working chap or even peasant—and suddenly it turns out that he's some sort of brass hat, and even sometimes a king. If that can happen to a peasant, just imagine what a gentleman could turn out to be? Suddenly, for example, I could be walking around in a general's uniform, an epaulette on my left shoulder, an epaulette on my right shoulder, a blue sash across my chest—how about that? our little beauty will sing a different tune then, won't she? and what will her papa say, our director? Oh yes, he's a great snob! He's a mason,

definitely a mason, although he puts on such a show, but I noticed at once that he's a mason: if he gives someone his hand he only holds out two fingers. And who's to say that this very moment I won't be appointed governor general, or quartermaster or something else? I would really like to know why I should be a titular councillor? Why exactly a titular councillor?

December 5

I spent the whole of this morning reading the papers. Strange things are going on in Spain. I can't even make them out properly. They write that the throne is empty and the grandees are in difficulties about electing an heir, which is leading to widespread perturbation. This strikes me as extremely strange. How can a throne be empty? They say that some doña is supposed to acceed to the throne. No doña can acceed to a throne. It's quite impossible. There can only be a king on a throne. So they say there's no king. It cannot happen that there's no king. No state can exist without a king. There is a king, but no one knows about him. He's lying low somewhere, incognito, perhaps because of family reasons, or because of fears of attack from neighbouring powers, like France and other countries, which are forcing him into hiding, or perhaps there are some other reasons.

December 8

I was quite on the point of going to work but various reasons and considerations prevented me. I simply cannot get this Spanish business out of my head. How can they possibly have some doña as their queen? Surely this won't be allowed. For a start England won't allow it. And then there are all those political affairs in Europe: the Emperor of Austria, our own Tsar... I must admit, all these events have so shattered me that I simply haven't been able to get down to anything all day. Mavra remarked that I was extremely distracted at the table. It's true, I appear to have thrown two plates onto the floor, which instantly smashed. After dinner I walked around by the mountains. Couldn't discover anything instructive. Most of the time I lay on my bed and reflected on this business in Spain.

43rd day of April in
the year 2000

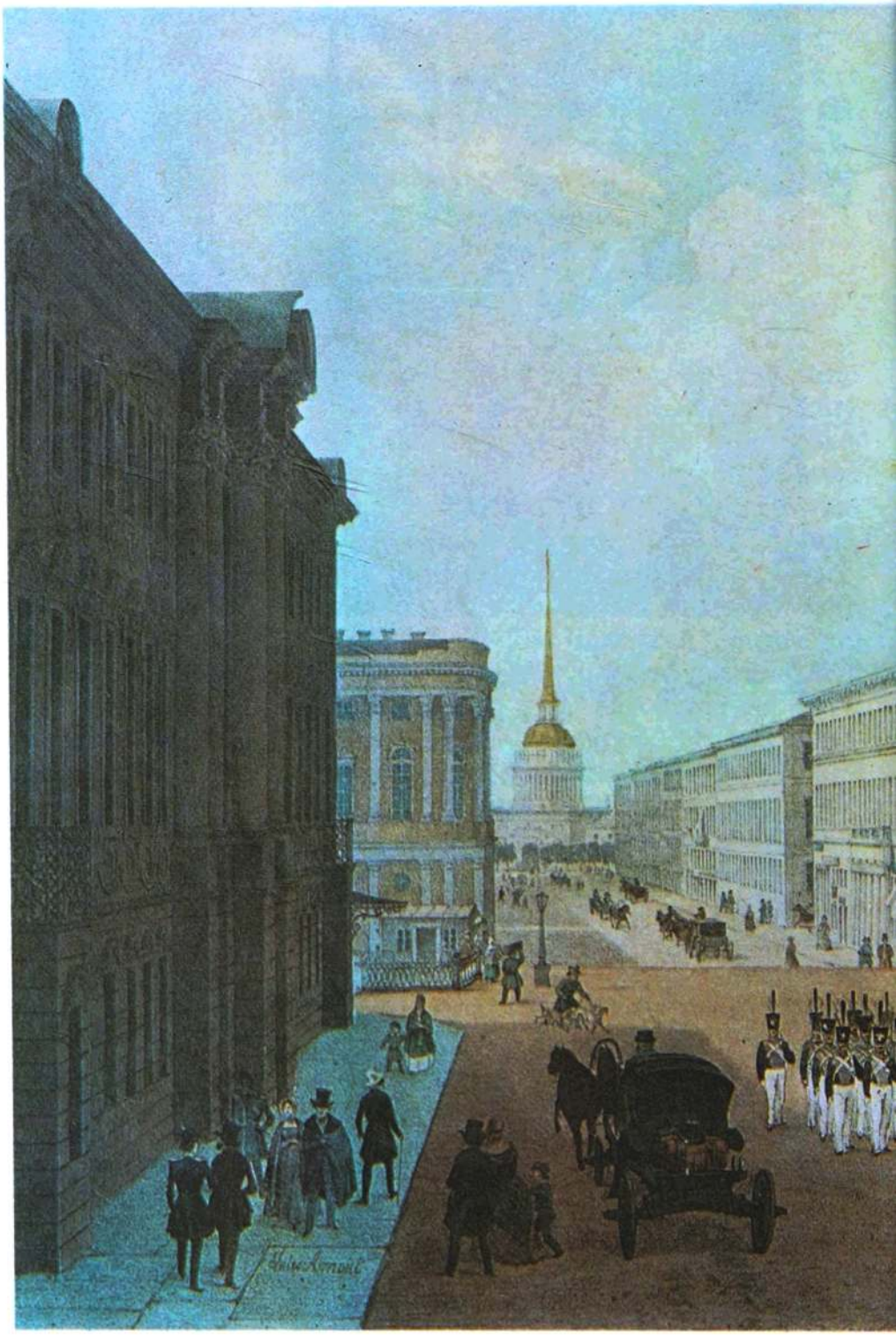
Today we celebrate a most illustrious event! Spain has a king. He has been found. I am this king. And it was only today that I discovered this. I must admit it suddenly dawned on me, in a flash. I can't understand how I could ever have thought I was a titular councillor. How could I have got this absurd idea into my head? It's a lucky thing no one put me in a madhouse. Now everything has been revealed to me. I see it all as clearly as my own hand. But before this, I don't know why, before I seemed to see everything through some sort of fog. I think this all can be explained by the mad idea people have that the brain is in the head. Nothing of the kind: it is carried by the wind from the direction of the Caspian Sea. First I informed Mavra who I am. When she heard that the King of Spain was standing before her she clapped her hands and almost died of fright. The silly girl—she's never seen a Spanish king before. However, I endeavoured to calm her, assuring her in benign words of my good favour, and that I am not at all angry about her occasionally not cleaning my boots very well. She's just an ignorant peasant, after all. You can't talk to people like that about higher things. She took fright because she was convinced that all the kings in Spain were like Philip II. But I explained to her that there is absolutely no resemblance between Philip II and myself and that I do not have a single Capuchin monk in my entourage... I did not go to work. To hell with the department! No, my friends, you won't lure me back there; you won't catch me copying any more of your foul documents!

Marchober the 86th.
Somewhere between day and night.

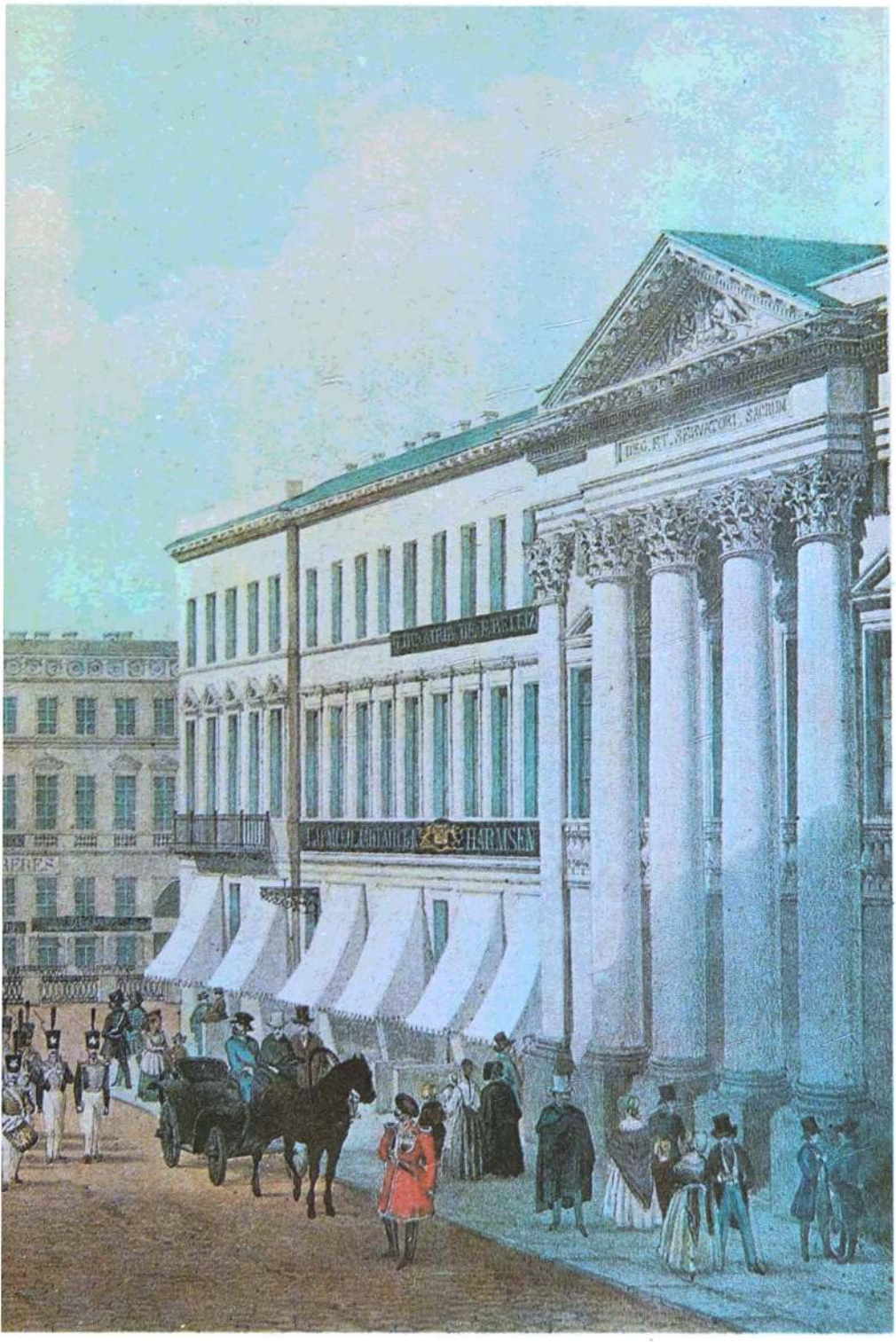
Today our administrative clerk came to say that I should go to work, that more than three weeks had passed since I had been in the department. So, just for a joke, I went. The section head obviously expected me to bow to him and to start apologizing, but I gave him an indifferent look, not too angry and not too benevolent, and sat at my place as if nothing had happened. I looked at all the office rabble and thought: if only you knew that amongst you sits... Lord God above! the uproar

you would create, and the section head himself would bowing and scraping before me, as he now does befor director. They stuck some papers in front of me for me to s an abstract. But I didn't lift a finger. A few minutes late place flew into a hubbub. Apparently the director had arr A lot of officials dashed forward, jostling one another to themselves to the director. But I didn't budge. Whe walked through our section everyone buttoned up their c but I didn't do a thing. Who do they think the directc Catch me rising to my feet before him?—Not on your Director—I ask you! He's a cork, not a director. An ordi common-or-garden cork, no more. The sort you use to bottles. But the most amusing thing of all was when they t some papers under my nose for me to sign. They thought I would write at the very bottom of the sheet: desk head s and-such, what else? but I chose the most important p where the department director signs his name, and wrote a flourish: Ferdinand VIII. You should have seen the rev silence that filled the room; but I merely nodded my head said: "No need for any signs of homage!" and departed. I there I went straight to the director's apartment. He was n home. The footman did not want to let me in, but I gave such a mouthful he was quite stupefied. I went straight t boudoir. She was sitting at a mirror, and on seeing me lea her feet and retreated. However, I didn't tell her I was the of Spain. I merely said that a happiness beyond her wi dreams awaited her, and that, despite the ploys of our ene we would be united. I did not wish to say more and too leave. Women! Such deceitful creatures! Only now ha understood what they are. Until now no one has really kn who women are in love with, and I'm the one to have di ered it: women are in love with the devil. I swear. Phys write all sorts of nonsense, that they are one thing another—but they love only the devil. You see her over t adjusting her lorgnette in the first circle? You think looking at that fat gentleman with the star? Not a bit of it, looking at the devil standing behind his back. Now he's hi in his star. But look, he's beckoning to her from there wit finger. And she'll marry him. She will, I tell you. And al lot, their high-ranking fathers, smarming around and their way into the court, and putting on that they are pa

N. V. Gogol, "Nevsky Prospekt", Illustrations by D. Kardovsky. Paper and cardboard, 1904.

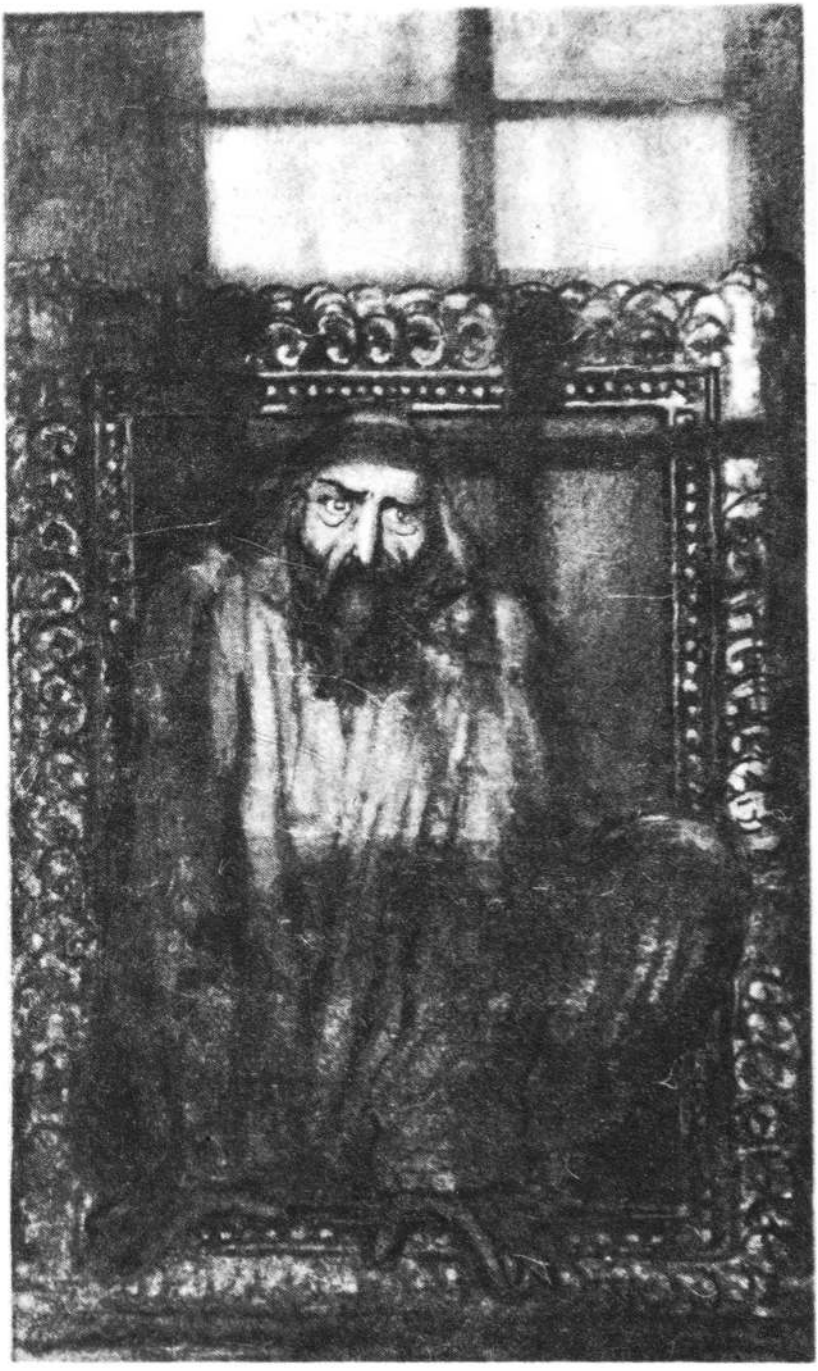


St. Petersburg. Nevsky Prospekt, by the Politseisky Bridge. Lithograph of the 1860s.


DEO. ET. SERVATORI. SACRUM
HARMSEN

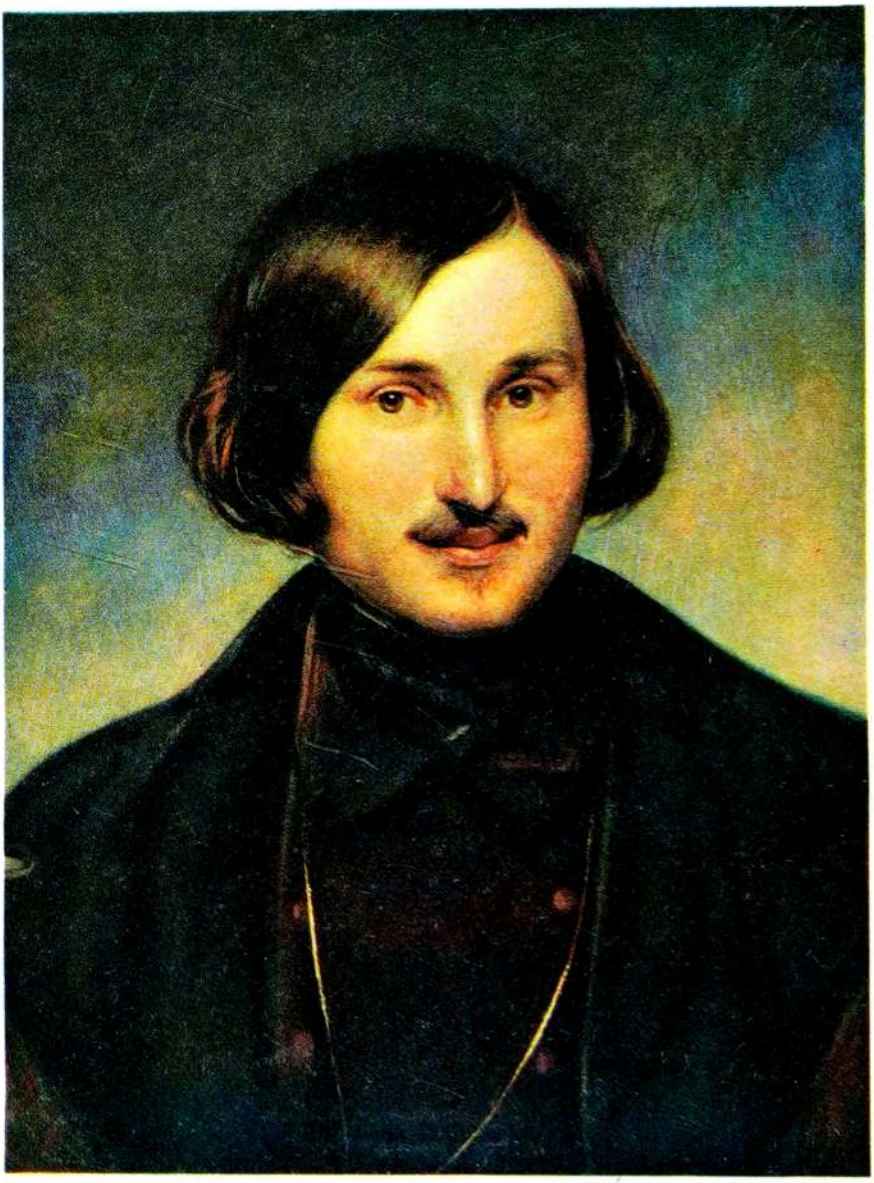
N. V. Gogol, "Nevsky Prospekt". Illustration by A. Kravchenko. Print.

N. V. Gogol, "Nevsky Prospekt". Illustration by A. Kravchenko. Print.

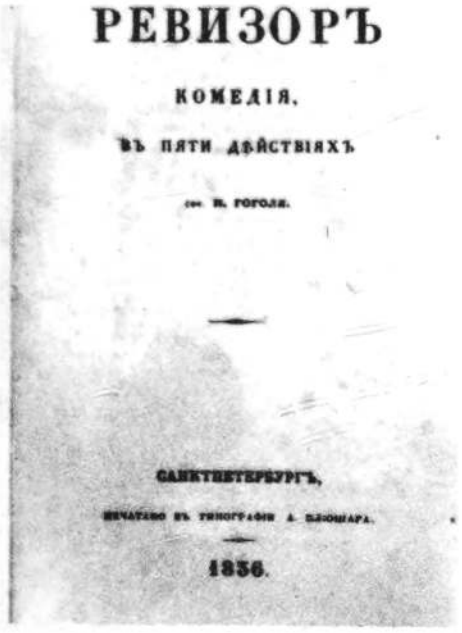


N. V. Gogol, "The Portrait". Illustration by K. Somov.

N. V. Gogol. "The Portrait." Illustrations by V. Vasnetsov. Paper, ink.



N. V. Gogol. Portrait by F. Moller, 1841.


РЕВИЗОРЪ

КОМЕДІЯ,

ВЪ ПЯТИ ДѢЙСТВІЯХЪ

Н. ГОГОЛЯ.

САНКТПЕТЕРБУРГЪ,

1836.

N. V. Gogol *The Government Inspector*. Title page of the St. Petersburg 1836 edition.

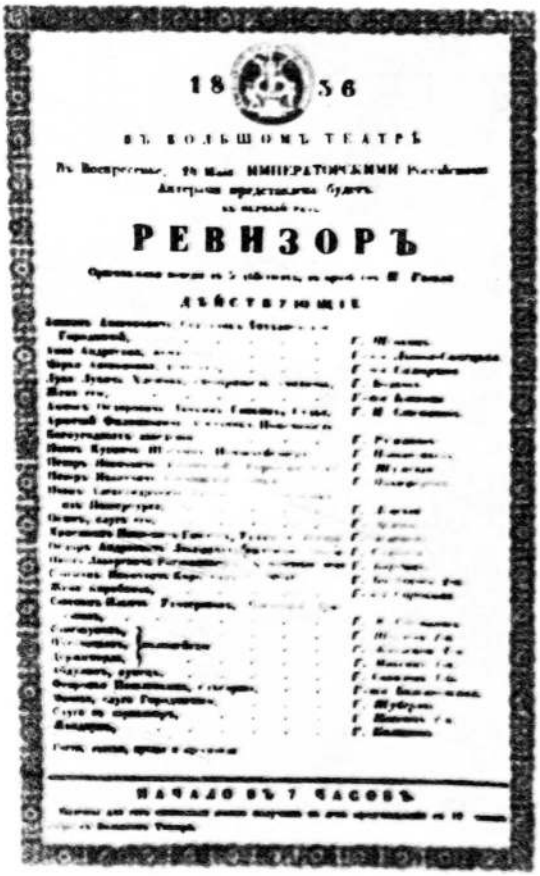
"I resolved in *The Government Inspector* to pile all the rubbish of Russia together ... and laugh at the whole lot."

N. V. Gogol, "Confession by an Author".

The Government Inspector. The dumb scene. Lithograph from a drawing by an unknown artist, 1830s.

The captions with the heroes' names are in Gogol's own hand. "There are no best scenes in *The Government Inspector* because there are no worst scenes: they are all excellent, the indispensable parts of an artistic whole..."

Vissarion Belinsky.



1836

В Б О Л Ь Ш О М Ъ Т Е А Т Р Ѣ

РЕВИЗОРЪ

Д Ѣ Й С Т В У Ю Щ І Е

НАЧАЛО ВЪ 7 ЧАСОВЪ

The Government Inspector. Poster of the play's first performance in Moscow, with M. S. Shchepkin playing the Mayor.

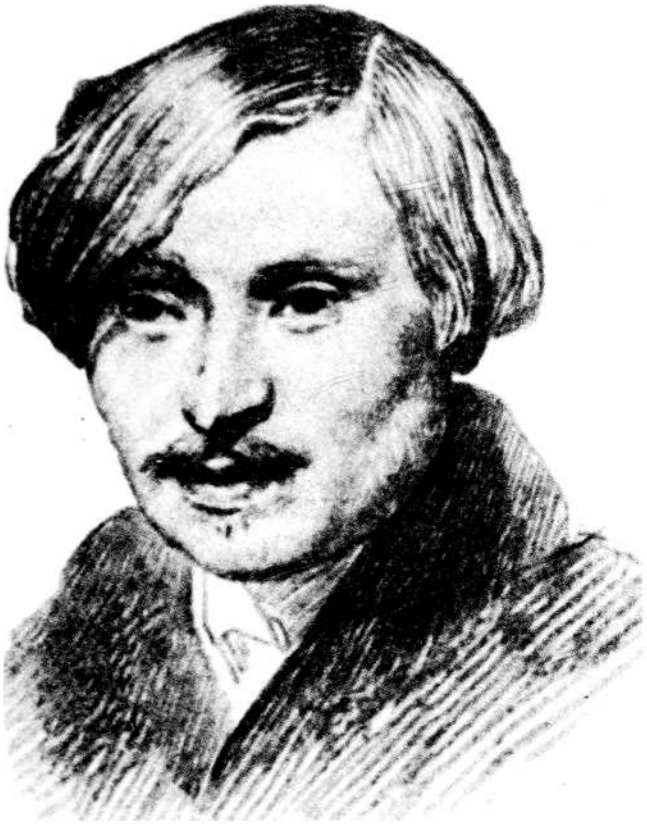
"The audience were amazed by the play's novelty and laughed an extraordinary amount, but I had expected a much more positive reception. ...A friend of mine offered an intriguing explanation: 'But think,' he said, 'how could they give it a better reception when half of them are bribe-takers and the other half bribe-givers?' "

M. S. Shchepkin, in a letter, June 3, 1836.

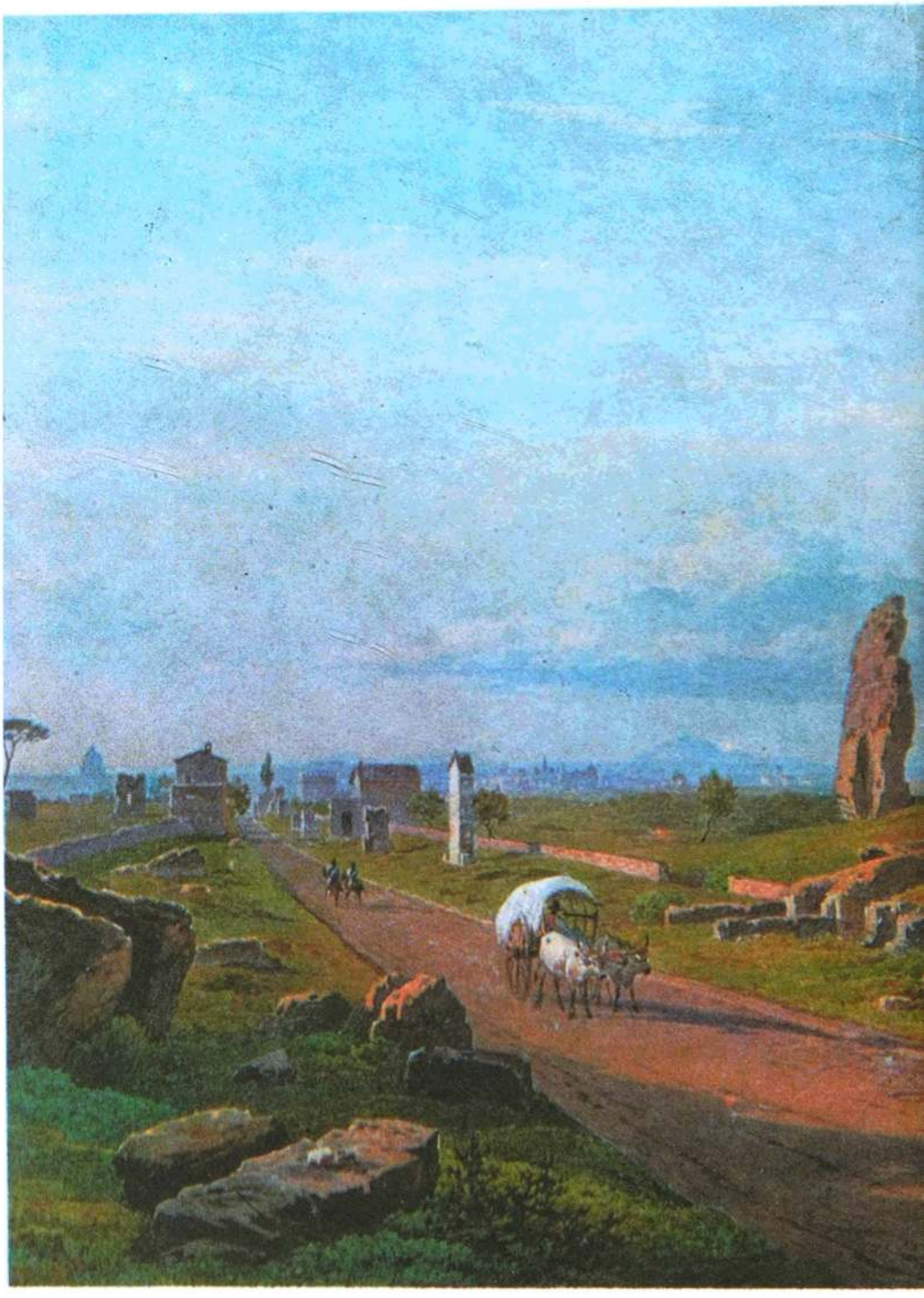
Moscow. Maly Theatre. Photograph taken at the end of the last century.

M. S. Shchepkin. Print from a water-colour by A. Dobrovolsky. 1839.

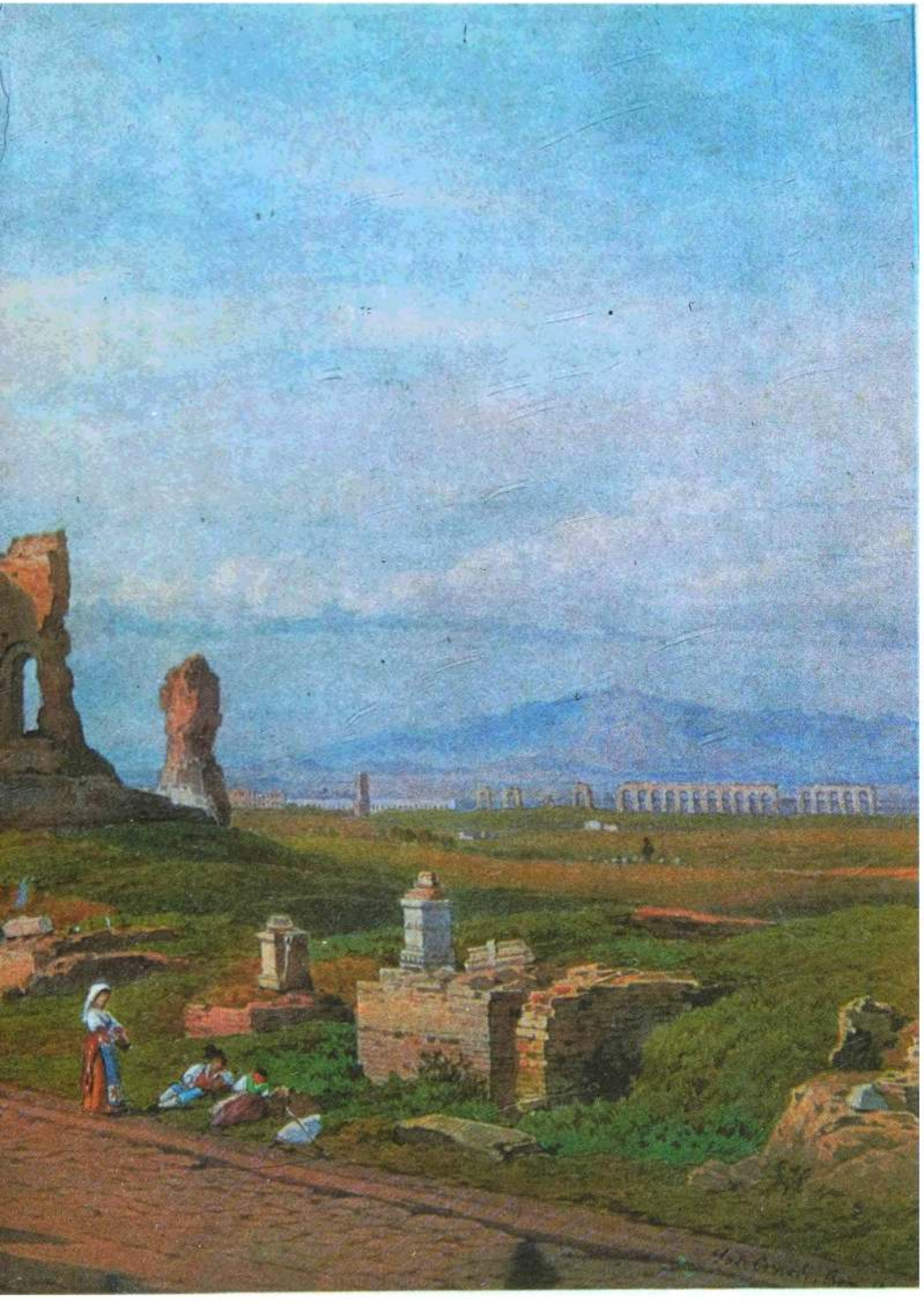
The Government Inspector. The Mayor. Drawing by an unknown artist, given to Gogol by Pushkin in 1835.



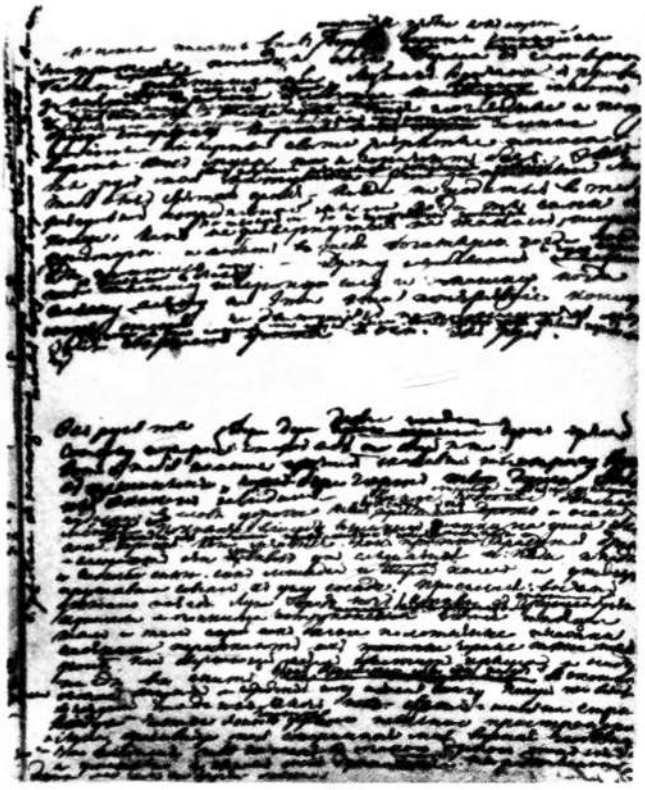
N. V. Gogol. Portrait by A. Ivanov, 1841. Paper, Italian cardboard.



Rome. The Appian Way. Watercolour by A. Karradi.
"Now I see foreign parts before me, foreign parts around me, but in my heart is Russia..."
Gogol to I. P. Pogodin, September 22, 1836.



Gogol in Zinaida Volkonskaya's villa in Rome. Pen and ink drawing by the poet V. A. Zhukovsky.



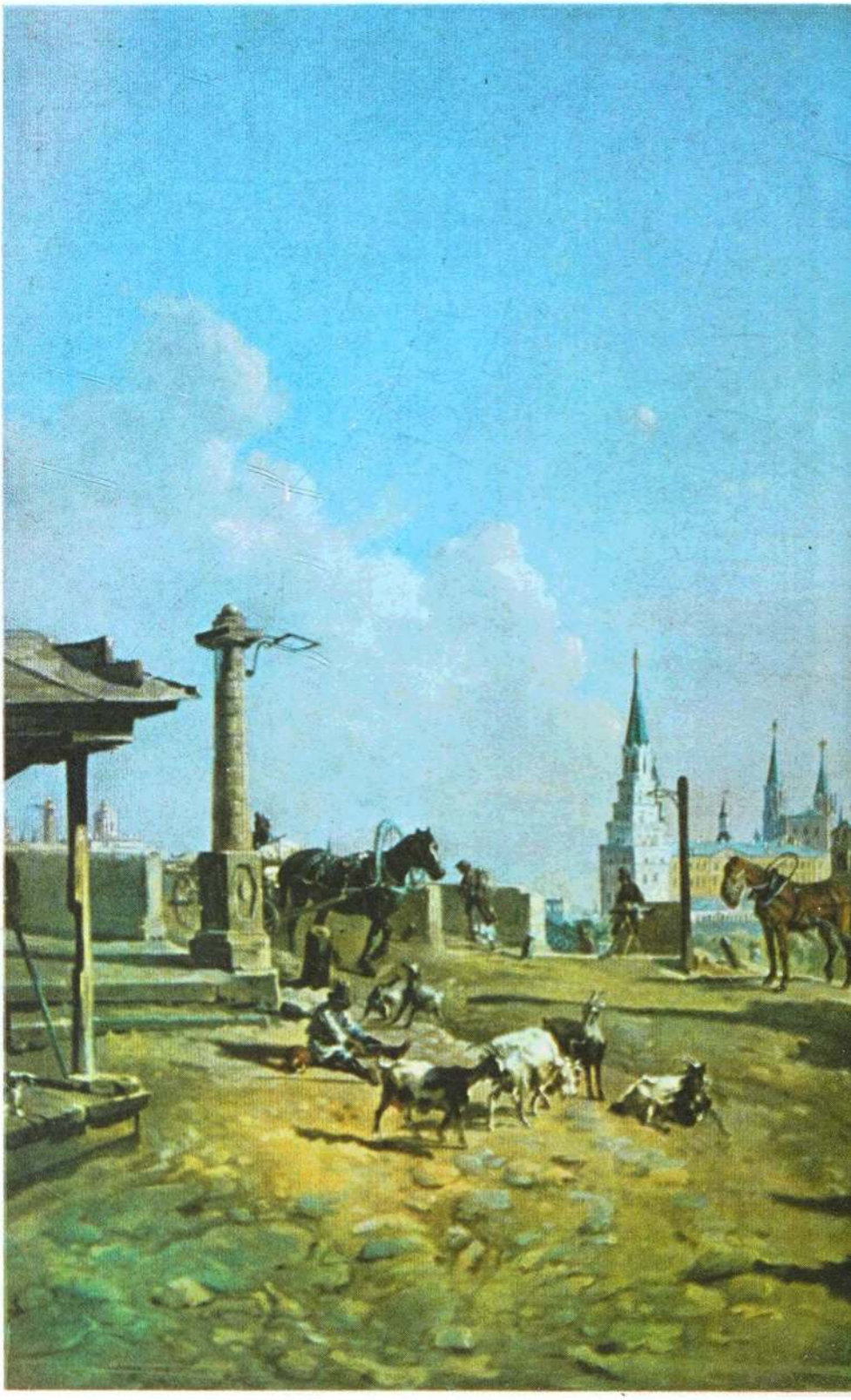
Dead Souls. Autograpn.
Pushkin "...gave me his own plot, from which he was planning to write something like a long poem and which, in his own words, he would not have given anyone else. This was the plot of *Dead Souls*."
Gogol, "Confession by an Author".

At Zinaida Volkonskaya's villa in Rome. Nikolai Gogol and Zinaida Volkonskaya. Pen and ink drawing by the poet V. A. Zhukovsky.

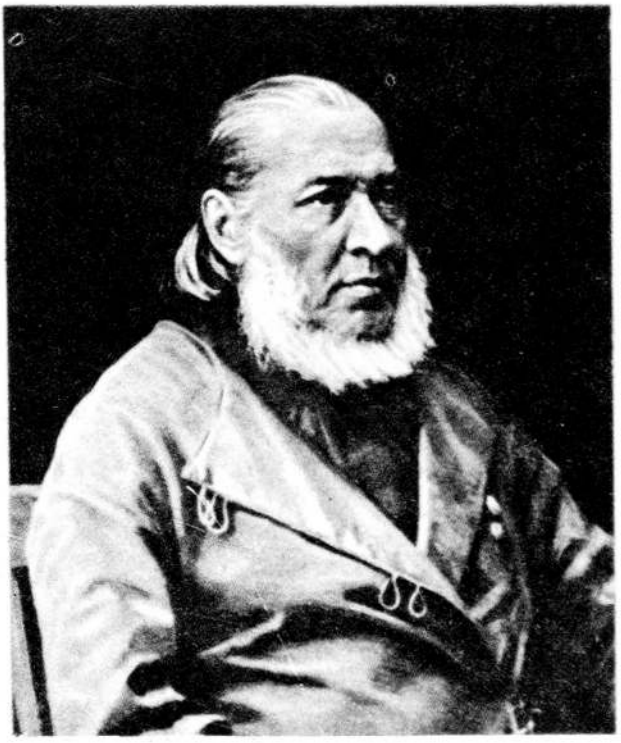
Gogol with a group of Russian artists. Rome. Daguerrotype, 1840s.

Paris. Boulevard Italien.
It was in Paris, in February 1837, that Gogol learnt of Pushkin's tragic death.
"My life, my supreme pleasure has died with him.
...When I wrote I always saw before me only Pushkin... Everything of value I have achieved I owe to him..."
Gogol to M. P. Pogodin, March 1837.

Mikhail Lermontov. Portrait by P. Zabolotsky. Canvas, oils.
Gogol met the author of the poem "Death of the Poet" (1837) on May 9, 1840, in Moscow.



Moscow. Picture by I. Reich. Canvas, oils.



The writer Sergei Aksakov. Photograph taken in the 1850s.

House in Abramtsevo, the Aksakovs' country residence, where Gogol was a frequent guest and where he read chapters from the second volume of *Dead Souls* to his friends. Photograph.

Vissarion Belinsky. Portrait by I. Astafiev

Dead Souls. Vol. I. Cover of the second edition. Designed by Gogol. "*Dead Souls* is worth more than anything else in Russian literature, for it combines the profundity of a vital social theme with sublime artistry of images..."

Vissarion Belinsky, "Chichikov's Escapades or *Dead Souls*".

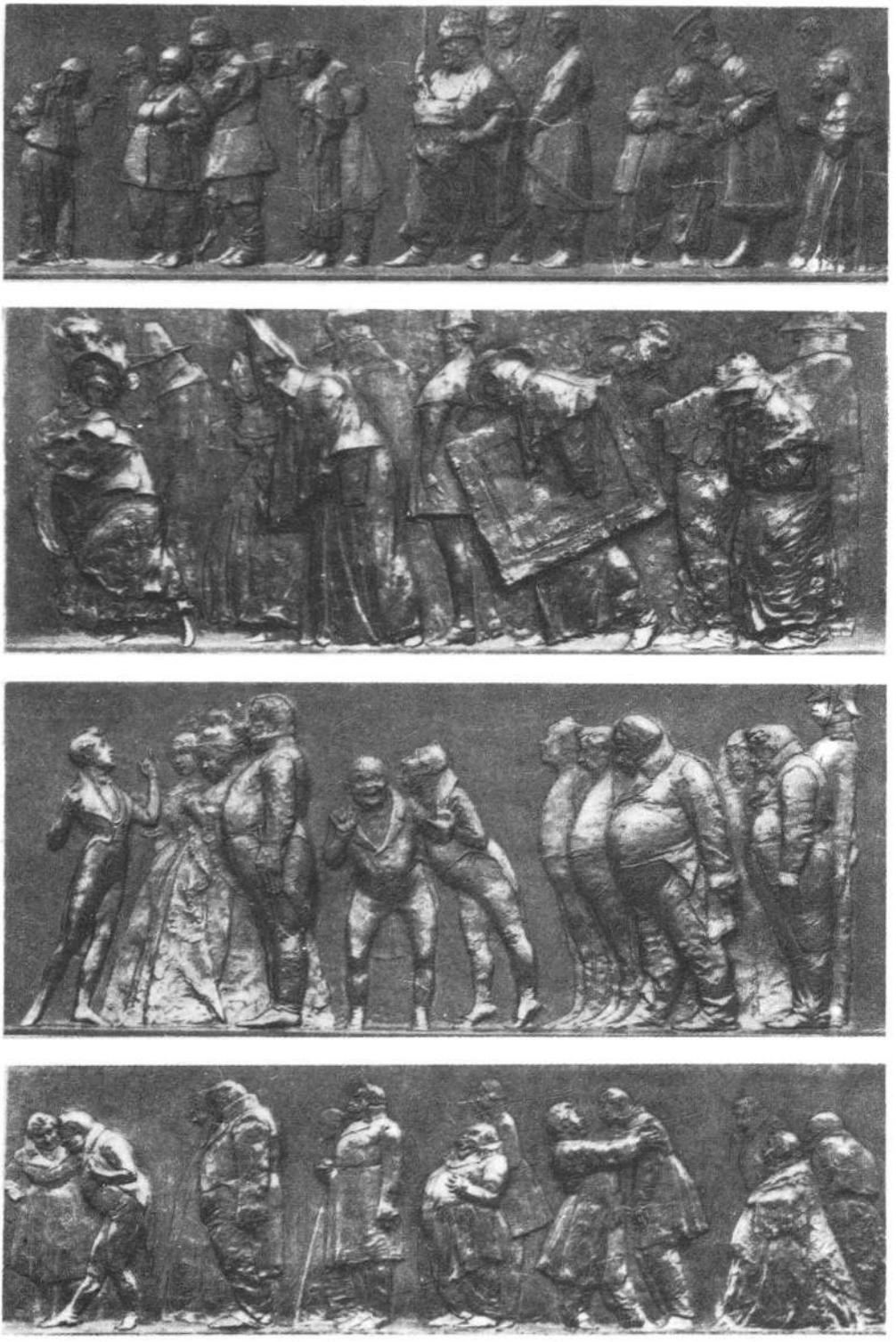
A. O. Smirnova-Rossett, a close friend of the writer's in the last years of his life. Portrait by N. Alexeyev. Watercolours.

The house in Kaluga where Gogol lived. Photograph.

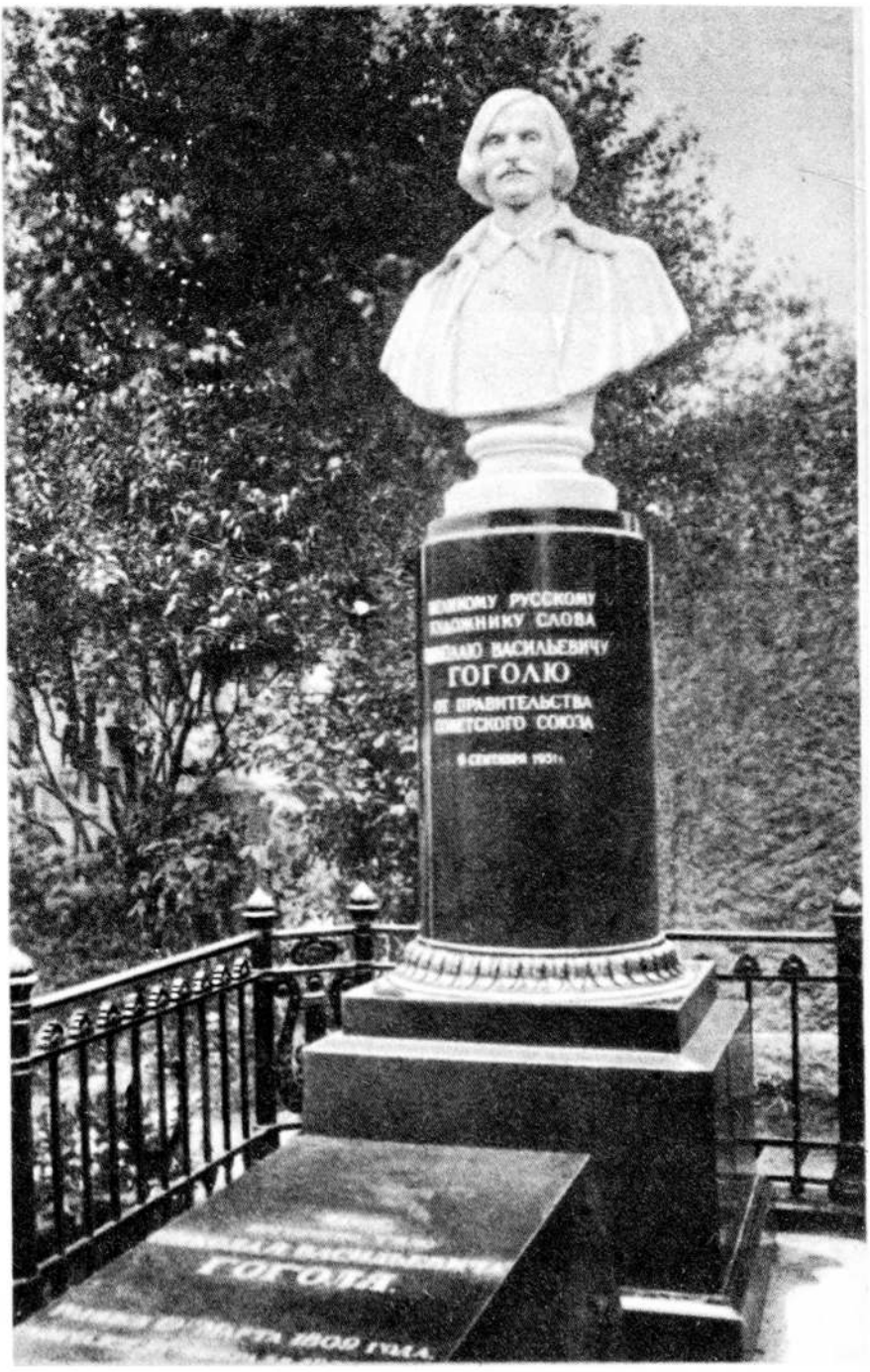
The last portrait made of Gogol. Lithograph from a drawing by E. Dmitriev-Mamontov, 1852.

No. 7a, Suvorov Boulevard in Moscow, where Gogol spent his last years and where he died on February 21, 1852. Photograph.

Statue of Gogol, by the sculptor N. Andreyev, which stands in front of the house.



Bas-reliefs on the pedestal of the statue, by Andreyev, depicting the heroes of Gogol's works: *Taras Bulba; St. Petersburg Stories; The Government Inspector; Dead Souls* (from top to bottom).



Gogol's grave in the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow. The bust is by N. Tomsky. "My thoughts, my name, my works belong to Russia." N. V. Gogol.

and so on and so forth: all they're after, these patriots, is rent and more rent! They'd sell their own mother, father, their God for money, nothing but a lot of careerists and Judases! All this vainglory and ambitiousness is caused by a little blister under their tongues containing a tiny worm the size of a pinhead, and all this is the handwork of a barber living on Gorokhovaya Street. I can't remember his name. But the whole conspiracy has been devised by the Turkish sultan, who is bribing the barber and wants to disseminate Mohammedanism throughout the world. They say that the majority of the population in France have already adopted the faith of Mahomet.

The nothingth. There was no date today.

I walked incognito along Nevsky Prospekt. His Majesty the Emperor rode past. The entire town doffed their hats and I did likewise, although I gave no sign that I was the king of Spain. I thought it improper to reveal myself then and there to all; because first one should present oneself at court. The only thing that has prevented me doing so is that I do not have any regal garb. If only I could get hold of a decent cape. I would have ordered one from a tailor but these people are such asses and they almost totally neglect their work, furthermore, being up to their ears in all sorts of swindles and spending most of the time paving the roads. I decided to make a cape out of my new uniform, which I've only worn twice. But as these scoundrels would only spoil it, I decided to sew it myself locking the door so no one could watch. I cut it up into pieces with scissors first, because it will have to have quite a different pattern.

Don't remember the date. There was no month either. Devil knows what's going on.

The cape is quite ready and sewn now. Mavra cried out when I put it on. However, I still haven't quite made up my mind to present myself at court. I still haven't received a deputation from Spain. It's not correct to go without deputies. I won't have nearly enough weight and dignity. I'm expecting them at any minute.

Date No. 1

I'm most surprised by the extreme tardiness of the deputies. What on earth can be detaining them? Surely not France? Yes, France is the most animadvertent of all the powers. I went to check up at the post office, in case they had the Spanish deputies. But the postmaster is extremely stupid and does not know anything—no, he says, we have no Spanish deputies here, but if you wish to write a letter we will accept carriage for the appropriate payment.—To hell with him! What's a letter? Rubbish. Apothecaries write letters...

Madrid. Februarius the Thirtieth

Thus I am in Spain, and it all happened so quickly that I have not yet regained my senses. This morning the Spanish deputies came to see me and I mounted a carriage together with them. I found the unusual speed most strange. We moved at such a rate that in half an hour we had reached the Spanish frontier. Actually they have these iron roads all over Europe now and the ships travel at a tremendous speed. It's a strange place, Spain: when we went into the first room I saw a large number of people with shaved heads. However I soon guessed that they must be Dominicans or Capuchins, because they shave their heads. I found the behaviour of the Chancellor of State extremely odd: he took me by the hand, pushed me into a small room and said: sit here, and if you carry on calling yourself King Ferdinad I'll come and King Ferdinand you. But I knew that he was only putting me to the test so I answered in the negative. For this the Chancellor whacked me so hard across the back with a stick that I almost cried out, but restrained myself, recalling that this is a knightly custom on acceding to a higher office, because such knightly customs survive to this day in Spain. Being left alone I decided to get down to affairs of state. I discovered that Spain and China are one and the same country and that it is only through sheer ignorance that they are regarded as two different ones. I advise everyone carefully to write on a piece of paper Spain and they will see the word China. However, I was extremely dismayed by the event which is to take place tomorrow. Tomorrow at 7

o'clock a strange phenomenon will be observed: the earth will sit on the moon. The famous English chemist Wellington has also written about this. I must admit, I experienced serious concern when I thought of the extreme tenderness and flimsiness of the moon. For the moon is usually made in Hamburg, and made extremely badly, I might add. I'm surprised that England hasn't turned her attention to this. The moon is made by some lame cooper, and you can see the idiot has no idea about moons at all. He put in a creosoted rope and some wood oil; and this has led to such a terrible stink all over the earth that you have to hold your nose. Another reason the moon is such a tender globe is that people just cannot live on it any more, and all that's left alive there are noses. This is also why we cannot see our own noses—they're all on the moon. And when I thought that the earth is a heavy object and could smash all our noses to smithereens once it sits on the moon I was overcome by such anxiety that I put on my stockings and shoes and hastened to the chamber of the State Council to issue a decree to the police not to allow the earth to sit on the moon. The Capuchins, of whom I found a great number in the chamber of the State Council, are an extremely intelligent crowd, and when I told them: "Gentlemen, we must save the moon, because the earth wants to sit on it", they all dashed off at once to carry out my monarchical desire and many of them climbed up the wall in order to grab hold of the moon, but at that moment the Lord Chancellor came in. On seeing him everyone fled. As the king, I alone stayed behind. But the Chancellor, to my great surprise, hit me with a stick and chased me back to my room. It's extraordinary what power popular customs have in Spain!

January of the same year, occurring after February

I still cannot understand what sort of a place this Spain is. The popular customs and court etiquette are quite extraordinary. I do not understand, I quite simply do not understand a thing. Today they shaved my head, although I screamed at the top of my voice that I had no desire to be a monk. But I can no longer remember what happened to me when they started dripping cold water on my head. I've never experienced such

hell before in my life. I very nearly threw a fit, and they had difficulty holding me down. I simply cannot understand the point of this ridiculous custom. A stupid, pointless custom! Nor can I understand the irrational behaviour of the kings who to this day have not discarded it. It would seem to me, to judge by all the signs, that I have fallen into the hands of the Inquisition, and the chap I took to be the Chancellor is in fact the Grand Inquisitor. The only thing I can't quite understand is how a king could be subjected to Inquisition. Of course, the whole thing might have been planned in France, by Polignac. Oh, that scoundrel Polignac! He has sworn to hound me to death. And he persecutes me night and day, but I know, my friend, that you are being led by the English. The English are great schemers. They worm their way in everywhere. The whole world knows that when England takes a pinch of snuff France sneezes.

25th day

Today the Grand Inquisitor came into my room, but I heard his footsteps from afar and hid under the chair. When he saw that I wasn't there he started to call me. First he shouted: "Poprishchin!"—I didn't say a word. Then: "Aksenty Ivanov! Titular Councillor! Gentleman!" I still held my tongue. "Ferdinand VIII, King of Spain!' I was on the point of sticking out my head, but then I thought: Oh no, brother, you wont get me that easily! We know your tricks: you'll start pouring cold water on my head again. However he spotted me and drove me out from under the chair with his stick. That cursed stick really hurts when it hits you! But I was compensated for all this by a discovery I have now made: I learnt that every cockerel has its own Spain, but it is under its feathers. The Grand Inquisitor left me in a rage and threatening some punishment. But I totally ignored his impotent rage, knowing that he functions like a machine, that he is the tool of the English.

The th34 of yrae yraurbeF 349

No I can't stand any more of it. Lord! the things they are doing to me! They pour cold water on my head. They won't

hear me, won't listen to me. What have I done to them? Why are they tormenting me? What do they want from me, wretch that I am? What can I give them? I have nothing. I haven't the strength, I can't take all their torture, my head is burning and everything's spinning before my eyes. Save me! take me away! give me a troika with three horses as fast as the wind! Climb aboard, coachman, ring, my bells, let it rip, horses, and bear me hence from this world! Further and further still, so that nothing more can be seen of it, not a thing! Look at the sky unfurling there before me; a star twinkles in the distance; the forest streaks by with its dark trees and silver moon; a grey mist wreathes beneath the horses' feet; a musical note rings out in the mist; on the one side you see the sea, on the other Italy; now Russian cottages come into sight. Is that not my house I can dimly see in the distance? Is that my mother sitting by the window? Mummy, save your poor son! shed a tear on his poor battered head and look how they are tormenting him! press your orphan boy to your breast! there is no place for him on earth! he is persecuted!—Mummy! have pity on your sick little child!... But do you know that the king of France has a wart bang under his nose?

1834

If your face is skew don't blame the mirror.

Popular saying

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Comedy in Five Acts

Translated by Christopher English and Gordon McDougall

Note from the Translators

It has been thought advisable to keep the text of the published version of *The Government Inspector* as close as possible to the original, and thus no attempt has been made here to translate the names, with the inevitable loss of a certain amount of specifically Gogolian, but untranslatable, humour.

In the adapted version of this translation which was performed by the Oxford Playhouse Company in 1975 English equivalents were given of a number of the names. To give the reader an idea of their effect we list here some of the more obviously motivated names and approximate English equivalents:

Judge Lyapkin-Tyapkin—Slapkin-Dashkin
Warden of Charities Zemlanika—Strawberry
Inspector of Schools Khlopov—Flogov
Postmaster Shpyokin—Snoopin
Constable Svistunov—Fistikov
Locksmith's wife Poshlyopkina—Slapcheekina
Khlestakov's friend Tryapichkin—Trashkin

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTON ANTONOVICH SKVOZNIK-DMUKHANOVSKY, the Mayor
ANNA ANDREYEVNA, his wife
MARIA ANTONOVNA, his daughter
LIKA LUKICH KHLOPOV, Inspector of Schools
HIS WIFE
AMMOS FYODOROVICH LYAPKIN-TYAPKIN, the Judge
ARTEMY FILIPPOVICH ZEMLANIKA, Warden of Charities
IVAN KUZMICH SHPYOKIN, Postmaster
PYOTR IVANOVICH DOBCHINSKY } local landowners
PYOTR IVANOVICH BOBCHINSKY }
IVAN ALEXANDROVICH KHLESTAKOV, a St. Petersburg clerk
OSIP, his manservant
CHRISTIAN IVANOVICH HIEBNER, District Physician
FYODOR ANDREYEVICH LYULYUKOV } retired civil servants, respected citizens
IVAN LAZAREVICH RASTAKOVSKY }
STEPAN IVANOVICH KOROBKIN }
STEPAN ILYICH UKHOVERTOV, Chief of Police
SVISTUNOV } police constables
PUGOVITSYN }
DERZHIMORDA }
ABDULIN, shopkeeper
FEVRONYA PETROVNA POSHLYOPKINA, locksmith's wife
SERGEANT'S WIDOW
MISHKA, Mayor's manservant
HOTEL WAITER
GUESTS, SHOPKEEPERS, TOWNSFOLK, PETITIONERS

Characters and costumes

Notes for the actors

The Mayor: a man who has been long in service and is, in his own way, quite shrewd. Although he does take bribes, he conducts himself with dignity; is fairly serious in mien, and even given to philosophical argument; he speaks neither loudly nor quietly, neither too much nor too little. Every word he utters is loaded with meaning. His facial features are coarse and hard like those of any man who has begun his arduous career at the very bottom rung. He shifts easily from fear to joy, from servility to arrogance, like a man of coarse sensibilities. He customarily goes about in a uniform with collar tabs and spurred top-boots. His hair is cropped short and greying.

Anna Andreyevna, his wife: a provincial coquette, in early middle age, brought up partly on romantic novels and albums, partly on running the pantry and maids' room. Extremely curious with a proclivity to vanity. Occasionally exercises power over her husband, for the simple reason that the latter does not have a ready answer for her. But this power extends only to matters of trifling importance and consists of scolds and jeers. In the course of the play she changes her costume four times.

Khlestakov, a young man of about 23, of slight build; a little scatterbrained and, as they say, a bit weak in the top storey. One of those people who are regarded as empty-headed in their offices. Speaks and acts without any forethought. Quite incapable of focussing his attention on any particular idea. His speech is jerky, and words spring from his lips quite unexpectedly. The more ingenuousness and naïveté the actor shows the more effective his performance will be. Fashionably dressed.

Osip, his manservant: is like all servants who are fairly advanced in years. Speaks in a serious tone; eyes mostly downcast, prone to moralize and fond of reciting to himself admonitions addressed to his master. His voice is nearly always level, and when talking to his master it takes on a harsh and curt expression, verging on rudeness. He is shrewder than his master and thus catches on before him, but does not talk much and keeps his own roguish counsel. Wears a shabby grey or dark blue and shabby frockcoat.

Bobchinsky and *Dobchinsky*: both small and short and very inquisitive; extraordinarily alike. Both have small pot-bellies. Both gabble with furious gesticulations. Dobchinsky is a little taller and more serious than Bobchinsky, but Bobchinsky is more easy-going and lively than Dobchinsky.

Lyapkin-Tyapkin, the Judge: a man who has read five or six books and thus is something of a free-thinker. A great amateur of conjecture, he gives special weight to everything he says. The actor playing this part must always retain a significant expression on his face. Talks in a bass voice drawling his vowels, emitting wheezing and croaking noises, like an old clock creaking in preparation to strike the hour.

Zemlanika, Warden of Charities: an extremely fat, sluggish and clumsy man, but for all that a cunning rascal. Extremely servile and anxious to please.

Postmaster: a man simple-hearted to the point of naïveté.

The other roles do not require special explanation. Their prototypes can be seen almost anywhere.

The actors must pay particular attention to the last scene. The last word to be spoken must have an immediate electrifying effect on everyone. The entire group must alter their positions in a split second. Cries of surprise must be emitted by all the ladies simultaneously, as if in one voice. The entire effect may be lost if these instructions are not followed.

ACT I

A room in the Mayor's house.

Scene I

Mayor, Warden of Charities, Inspector of Schools, Judge, Chief of Police, District Physician, Two Police Constables.

MAYOR. Gentlemen, I have invited you here to convey to you some extremely unpleasant news. We are to be visited by a Government Inspector.

JUDGE. Inspector?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. What inspector?

MAYOR. A Government Inspector from St. Petersburg. Incognito. And, what's more, with secret instructions.

JUDGE. Well there's a thing!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. What a thing to happen!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Good Lord! And with secret instructions!

MAYOR. I had a sort of premonition of this: last night I dreamt the whole night about two extraordinary rats. I've never seen anything like them before, let me tell you: huge black brutes! They crept up to me closer and closer, sniffed ... and went away again. And then this morning, when I woke up, there was this letter for me from Chmykhov—you know him, Artemy Filippovich. Listen to this now: "My dear friend, cousin and benefactor (*mutters under his breath, quickly skimming the lines with his eyes*) ... to warn you... Ah! here it is: "Amongst other things, I hasten to warn you that a government official has arrived here with instructions to inspect the entire province, and especially our district (*raises his finger significantly*). I have this from the most reliable sources, althought I gather he poses as a private person. And since I know that, like everyone, you've committed the odd little sin, because you're a clever man and don't like to miss opportunities..." (*pauses*) well, we're all friends here... "I would advise

you to take precautions, as he could arrive any time, if indeed he isn't already there, and staying somewhere incognito... Yesterday I..." Well, this is all family stuff, "my sister Anna Kirillovna is visiting us with her husband; Ivan Kirillovich has got extremely stout and is still playing the violin..." and so on and so forth. So now you know how things stand.

JUDGE. Yes, it's an extraordinary situation, quite extraordinary. There's something behind it all.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. But why, Anton Antonovich? What does it mean? Why are we getting an inspector?

MAYOR. Why! It's the vagaries of fate, I suppose! (*Sighs.*) Before this, thank God, they've always gone to other towns; it's our turn now.

JUDGE. It's my belief, Anton Antonovich, that there's a subtle, political reason for this. This is what it means: Russia ... yes, Russia wants to go to war, and the ministry, you see, is sending an official to look for any traitors.

MAYOR. Well, now I've heard everything! And you a clever man! Traitors—in our back end of the woods? You could gallop for three years without reaching a foreign country.

JUDGE. No, let me tell you, you're ... er ... it's not quite... The government are a smart crowd. We may be far away, but they keep tabs on us just the same.

MAYOR. Tabs or no tabs, you've been warned, gentlemen. Now, speaking for myself, I've given out a few instructions, and I advise you to do likewise. Particularly you, Artemy Filippovich. There's no doubt about it, the official will want to inspect your charitable institutions as soon as he arrives, so make sure everything is in order. Let's have clean night-caps and tidy up the patients so they don't look like blacksmiths, the way they usually do.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Well, that's no problem. We can easily put our hands on some clean night-caps.

MAYOR. Do that. And another thing: put some inscription above each of the beds in Latin or some such language... That's really your department, Christian Ivanovich—the name of the illness, when the patient fell ill, date, day of the week. And for heaven's sake get them to stop smoking that foul tobacco—you almost choke when you get inside the door. And you'd better throw some of them out. There are too many

of them: the Inspector will think the doctor's incompetent.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Oh no, Dr. Hiebner and I have worked out a system—we don't use costly medicines, we leave it all to nature. The common man is a simple creature. If he dies, he dies, if he recovers, he recovers. It's hard for Dr. Hiebner to discuss the patients' complaints with them seeing as he can't speak a word of Russian.

District Phisician makes sound in the nature of "eeehh".

MAYOR. Now as for you, Ammos Fyodorovich, you'd better do something about that courthouse of yours. The watchmen are raising a family of geese in the waiting room, and goslings get under people's feet. I'm all for husbandry and why shouldn't watchmen try their hand at it too?—but the courtroom's not the place for it. I meant to say something about it to you before, but somehow it always slipped my mind.

JUDGE. I'll have them taken straight to the kitchen. Would you care to come to dinner tonight, Anton Antonovich?

MAYOR. I don't like the way you have all that stuff lying around in your own chambers, either. And that whip above the filing cabinet—it won't do. I know you're fond of hunting, but put it out of sight until after the Inspector's been, and then you can hang it up again, if you wish. And that public prosecutor of yours ... a very clever man, I know, but he reeks like a distillery. It's simply not on. I wanted to mention it before but something put it out of my mind. There are things you can take for it nowadays, if it really is his natural smell, as he says. You could tell him to eat onions, or garlic or something. Or may be Dr. Hiebner could give him something for it.

District Physician utters same sound.

JUDGE. I'm afraid he can't get rid of it. He says his nurse dropped him when he was a baby and he's smelt of vodka ever since!

MAYOR. Well I just wanted to bring it to your attention. And as for my private arrangements, and what Chmykhov calls "little sins" in his letter—well I have nothing to say on that score. There's no such thing as a man who has no sins of any sort to his name. That's the way God Himself has arranged things, despite what the Voltairians say.

JUDGE. But what do you consider to be "little sins", Anton Antonovich? I mean, there are sins and sins. I'm quite prepared to admit that I take bribes—but what sort of bribes? Borzoi puppies. They don't really count.

MAYOR. Oh yes they do, they're still bribes, aren't they?

JUDGE. Come now, Anton Antonovich. What about when someone accepts a 500 ruble fur coat, or a shawl for his wife?...

MAYOR. All right: so maybe you do only take borzoi puppies. But then you don't believe in God and you never go to church. At least I'm a loyal church-going man. But you... I know all about you: when you start talking about the creation of the world my hair stands on end.

JUDGE. Well, that's the way I thought it out, for myself.

MAYOR. If you ask me, it would be better not to think at all than to think too much. Anyway, I just thought I'd mention the courthouse, but quite honestly no one's likely to want to go in there: you're in an enviable position, it must be under divine protection. And as for you, Luka Lukich, you really must do something about the school teachers. I realise that they are learned men, and went to various colleges, but their behaviour is extremely odd, which I suppose is only to be expected with all that learning. But there's one of them now, the one with the fat face... I can't remember his name. He can't get up behind his desk without pulling the most frightful faces, like this (*pulls a face*) and then tugging at his beard from behind his cravat. Of course, when he does this in front of his pupils it may not matter much, it may even be necessary, I'm no judge of these things, but just imagine what'll happen if he starts doing it in front of a visitor: the Government Inspector may take it as a personal affront. The devil knows what it could lead to.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Well, honestly, what am I to do with him? I've already told him about it several times. Why, just the other day, when the Marshall came into the classroom he pulled a face the like of which I've never seen. I know he does it out of the kindness of his heart, but then I get choked off for filling the heads of the young with free-thinking ideas.

MAYOR. Then here's the history master. I'm quite certain he knows his subject inside out, but he gets so carried away with it that he quite forgets himself. I listened to him once—so

long as he was talking about the Assyrians and Babylonians he was fine, but the moment he got onto Alexander the Great you'd have thought the place was on fire. He leapt out from behind his desk, picked up a chair and brought it crashing down on the floor. All right, Alexander was a great man, but that's no reason to smash up the furniture. Those chairs cost money, you know. Government money.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Yes, he's certainly an enthusiast. I've brought his attention to it before. But all he says is "You may say what you like, but I'll lay down my life in the cause of knowledge".

MAYOR. It seems to be an inexplicable law of fate with clever men that they either have to be terrible drunkards or go about pulling the most hideous faces.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. God help anyone who goes into education, you're never safe. Everyone pokes their noses in all over the place. They all want to prove they're just as learned as the next man.

MAYOR. Yes, well, all that wouldn't really matter, if it wasn't for this confounded incognito business! Any moment he'll poke his head round the corner: "Ah! here you are, my dear chaps!" he'll say. "And tell me, who's the Judge here?"—"Lyapkin-Tyapkin."—"Fetch me Lyapkin-Tyapkin!"—And who's the Warden of Charities?"—"Zemlanika." —"Then fetch me Zemlanika!" That's the worst thing about it.

Scene II

Enter Postmaster.

POSTMASTER. What's all this about some government official?

MAYOR. What, don't you know?

POSTMASTER. I heard something from Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky. In the post office.

MAYOR. So? And what do you think?

POSTMASTER. I think we're going to war with Turkey.

JUDGE. Exactly! Just what I said!

MAYOR. Now they've both got the sow by the ear!

POSTMASTER. No, it's obvious! War with the Turks—those dirty Frogs have been at it again.

MAYOR. War with the Turks my ankle! We're the ones who're going to suffer, not the Turks. I've had a letter.

POSTMASTER. Ah, a letter! Then it's not war with the Turks!

MAYOR. Now, how do you like that?

POSTMASTER. Me? How do you like it, more to the point?

MAYOR. Oh, I'm not worried, not very much. It's true the shopkeepers and tradesmen bother me a bit, they complain I've been giving them a hard time, but let me tell you, if I do take the odd thing from them I do it without any malice. As a matter of fact, I have a sneaking feeling (*taking him by the arm draws him to one side*) someone might have informed on me. Otherwise why should they send an inspector to us? Listen, Ivan Kuzmich, don't you think you might perhaps, for the benefit of us all, just take every letter which goes through your post office, and, you know, steam it open a little and see what it's about, if it's anyone informing, or just regular correspondence? If it's harmless, seal it up again. Actually, you can even deliver it like that, unsealed.

POSTMASTER. Oh I know the way... No need to tell me, I do it anyway, but not for security reasons ... more out of curiosity, really. I'm just devilish curious about what's going on in the world. And let me tell you, letters make marvellous reading... So edifying, too... Sometimes they can be better than anything in the Moscow Gazette!

MAYOR. Well, in that case tell me, didn't you read anything about some official from St. Petersburg?

POSTMASTER. No, nothing about a St. Petersburg official. Plenty about Kostroma and Saratov officials, though. Pity you don't read letters, you don't know what you're missing. Just recently a lieutenant in a letter to his friend described a ball in quite the most audacious ... really a fine description: "My life, my dear friend, unfolds, as they say, in the Empyrean sphere: flags unfurling, bands playing, ladies aplenty." ...Yes, written with real feeling. I even kept it for myself. Shall I read it to you?

MAYOR. This is hardly the time. But do me a favour, Ivan Kuzmich, if you should happen to get one with any complaints or denunciations in it then don't hesitate to intercept it, don't have any scruples.

POSTMASTER. Why, of course, with great pleasure.

JUDGE. You'd better be careful, you two, or you'll find yourselves in hot water.

POSTMASTER. God forbid!

MAYOR. Nonsence. We won't make them public knowledge, strictly confidential, you understand?

JUDGE. Yes, there's a nasty smell in the air. As a matter of fact, I was just coming to see you, Anton Antonovich, with a little treat: a puppy. From the same litter as that handsome hound of mine, you know the one I mean. You've heard, of course, that Cheptovich is suing Varkhovinsky, which is absolutely splendid for me: I can have free hunting on both their estates...

MAYOR. Listen, old boy, I've got other things on my mind right now than your hunting. I can't get this damned incognito out of my head. Any minute I expect the door to open—and lo and behold...

Scene III

Enter Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky, out of breath.

BOBCHINSKY. A most extraordinary thing!

DOBCHINSKY. A quite unexpected thing!

ALL. What? What is it?

DOBCHINSKY. Something quite extraordinary. We just popped into the inn...

BOBCHINSKY (*interrupting*). Yes, I'd just popped into the inn with Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY (*interrupting*). Pray, allow me, Pyotr Ivanovich, I'll tell the story.

BOBCHINSKY. No, no, on the contrary, allow me ... you can't tell stories properly.

DOBCHINSKY. But you'll get muddled and forget all the important things.

BOBCHINSKY. I most certainly will not. And I beg you not to interrupt; let me tell the story, and don't interrupt. Do me a favour, gentlemen, and tell Pyotr Ivanovich not to interrupt.

MAYOR. What is all this? For the love of God, get on with it—this is unbearable. Do sit down, gentlemen! Here,

Pyotr Ivanovich, take this chair! (*They all sit round the two Pyotr Ivanoviches.*) Well now, what is all this about?

BOBCHINSKY. Allow me: I'll get it all in the proper order. I'd just had the pleasure of leaving you right after you'd received that upsetting letter, yes, I'd just said goodbye to you and ... now, please, Pyotr Ivanovich, don't interrupt, I can remember everything ... and dropped in on Korobkin. But Korobkin wasn't at home, so I dropped in on Rastakovsky, but Rastakovsky was out, so then I called in on Ivan Kuzmich to tell him your news, and when I left him I bumped into Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY (*interrupting*). Near the stall where they sell meat pies.

BOBCHINSKY. Near the stall where they sell meat pies. So when I saw Pyotr Ivanovich, I said to him: "Have you heard the news Anton Antonovich got in his letter—from a reliable source?" But Pyotr Ivanovich had already heard about it from your housekeeper, Avdotya, who'd just been sent round to Pochechuyev's for something or other.

DOBCHINSKY. For a flask of French brandy.

BOBCHINSKY (*pushing away Dobchinsky's hands*). For a flask of French brandy. And then Pyotr Ivanovich and I went to Pochechuyev's... Now please, Pyotr Ivanovich, just don't interrupt, will you!... We were on our way to Pochechuyev's when suddenly Pyotr Ivanovich says: "Let's pop into the inn, I've had nothing to eat since this morning and my stomach's starting to rumble"—Pyotr Ivanovich's stomach, that is, do you see—"and they've just got some fresh salmon in," he says, "we could have a bite to eat." And no sooner do we enter the inn than this young man—

DOBCHINSKY. Quite well turned out, but in mufti.

BOBCHINSKY. Quite well turned out, but in mufti, comes in and just strolls across the room with such a thoughtful look on his face, do you know ... and such features ... manners ... and obviously quite a lot up here. (*Waves his hand around his head.*) And suddenly it hits me, something like a revelation, and I turn to Pyotr Ivanovich and say: "You know, there's something funny about all this." And Pyotr Ivanovich just flicks his fingers for the inn-keeper, you know, old Vlas: his wife had a baby three weeks ago, such a bright little chap, too, he'll be running an inn himself one of these days, just like his

dad. So Pyotr Ivanovich whispers to old Vlas: "Who is that young man?" he asks; and Vlas says: "That," he says ... look, don't interrupt, Pyotr Ivanovich, please stop interrupting. You can't tell a story properly, you've got a lisp; you know very well you have, one of your teeth whistles when you talk ... anyway, "That young man," he says, "is an official, he is, come from Petersburg. Name of Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov, and," says old Vlas, "he's on his way to Saratov province, and there's something fishy," says old Vlas, "about the way he's been carrying on: this is the second week he's been here, he shows no sign of leaving, has everything charged to his account, and won't part with a single kopeck!" And when I heard this it suddenly dawned on me. "Aha!" I said to Pyotr Ivanovich—

DOBCHINSKY. No, Pyotr Ivanovich, it was me that said "Aha"!

BOBCHINSKY. Well, you said it first, then I said it. "Aha!" we said, "And just what might he be doing staying put here when he's supposed to be going to Saratov?" Oh yes! It's him, that's who it is.

MAYOR. Who?

BOBCHINSKY. The official you had news of, the inspector.

MAYOR (*in fright*). Dear God, no! It can't be him.

BOBCHINSKY. It must be: he never pays for anything and he shows no intention of leaving; who else could it be? And he's even got an order for horses to Saratov.

BOBCHINSKY. Oh, it's him all right. He's an axe-my-eye, let me tell you. He doesn't miss a thing. He saw we were eating salmon—mainly for Pyotr Ivanovich's stomach, you understand... Yes, and then he came over and glanced at our plates. Such a sharp look, too: I was scared stiff.

MAYOR. Lord have mercy on us sinners! What room is he in?

DOBCHINSKY. No. 5, under the stairs.

BOBCHINSKY. The same room where those officers had a fight last year.

MAYOR. And has he been here long?

DOBCHINSKY. About two weeks already. He arrived on St. Basil's day.

MAYOR. Two weeks! (*Aside.*) Holy saints and martyrs!

In the last two weeks the sergeant's widow has been flogged, the convicts haven't had their rations. The streets are covered in rubbish. What disgrace! What infamy! (*Clutches his head.*)

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Should we go in a delegation to the inn, Anton Antonovich?

JUDGE. No, no. First it should be the head of the community, then the clergy, then the tradesmen, let's do it all as it says in the Freemason's Handbook.

MAYOR. No, no, I'll deal with this my way, thank you. We've had hard times before and we've pulled through, and even come out on top. With God's help we might pull through this one too. (*To Bobchinsky.*) You say he's a young man?

BOBCHINSKY. Oh yes, no more than twenty-three or four.

MAYOR. So much the better. It's easier to get the measure of the young ones. We'd be in trouble if he was some old devil, but these youngsters are plain sailing. Now gentlemen, you go and polish up your doorsteps, and I'll just pop round with Dobchinsky informally to make sure the visitors are being looked after. Hey, Svistunov!

SVISTUNOV. Yes?

MAYOR. Run and get the chief of police.—No wait, I need you here. Go and tell someone else to fetch him, as quickly as possible, and then come back here.

Svistunov races off.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. We'd better be off, Ammos Fyodorovich, we could be in for real trouble.

JUDGE. What have you got to worry about? Just hand out a few clean night-caps and no one'll be any the wiser.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. It's not the night-caps I'm worried about. I'm supposed to be feeding them meat-broth, and there's such a stench of cabbage in the place you have to hold your breath!

JUDGE. Well, I'm not going to lose any sleep about it. And, anyway, who's going to want to inspect the court house? If he does read any of the papers in there he'll bitterly regret it. I've sat 15 years on the bench and every time I try and sort out a report I have to give it up as a bad job. Solomon himself couldn't sort out the true and the false in a law report.

Exeunt Judge, Warden of Charities, Director of Schools and Postmaster, colliding in doorway with constable who is returning.

Scene IV

MAYOR. Well, is the droshky ready?

SVISTUNOV. Yes, your Honour.

MAYOR. Right: go outside ... no, wait. Go and fetch me ... where are all the rest of you? Are you the only one? I thought I gave instructions that Prokhorov was to be here. Where's Prokhorov?

SVISTUNOV. Prokhorov's in the police station, only he's not really available for duty.

MAYOR. How come?

SVISTUNOV. It's like this you see: they had to carry him in this morning, squiffed as a newt, your Honour. We've poured two tubs of water over him, but he still hasn't sobered up.

MAYOR (*clutching his head*). Holy Mother of God, what next? Quick, nip outside and ... no, wait, run up to my room, do you hear, and get my sword and my new hat. Right, Dobchinsky, let's go.

BOBCHINSKY. Me too ... let me come too, Anton Antonovich.

MAYOR. No, no, I'm sorry, Pyotr Ivanovich, you can't. It would be too awkward, and there really isn't room for you in the droshky.

BOBCHINSKY. Never mind, I'll get there: I'll just scurry along behind the carriage. I only want to have a little peep through the chink in the door and get another look at this manner of his...

MAYOR (*to the constable, taking his sword*). Now quickly round up the rest of the constables and tell them to... But look at that blade—all scratched to pieces! That confounded shopkeeper Abdulin—he can see the Mayor's sword is past it and he doesn't send a new one. What a pack of rogues! The dirty frauds, I suppose they're already hard at it concocting petitions about me. Yes. Tell the constables to take brooms and start streeting the sweep. Damn it! Sweeping the street, the one that leads to the inn, and make sure they sweep it clean. And listen you, I know you, you get chatting and slip the silver spoons down your bootlegs, you needn't think you can pull the wool over my eyes... Remember how you rooked Chernyayev, the draper? He gave you two yards of cloth for a

uniform and you went and swiped the whole roll! You'd better watch out, constable, you're getting big for your boots. On the double!

Scene V

Enter Chief of Police.

MAYOR. Ah! Stepan Ilyich, in God's name where have you been? What the devil are you playing at?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Well, I was at the gates.

MAYOR. Now listen here, Stepan Ilyich! This official from Petersburg is in town already. What have you done about it?

CHIEF OF POLICE. As you directed: I got constable Pugovitsyn to go out with some of the men and sweep the pavements.

MAYOR. And where's Derzhimorda?

CHIEF OF POLICE. Derzhimorda's gone on the fire cart.

MAYOR. And Prokhorov's drunk?

CHIEF OF POLICE. 'Fraid so.

MAYOR. But how did you let that happen?

CHIEF OF POLICE. God knows. There was a fight outside town yesterday—he went to sort it out and came back drunk.

MAYOR. Now listen, this is what you must do: Constable Pugovitsyn, he's a tall bloke, you should put him on the bridge for effect. And have them pull down that old fence by the shoemaker's and mark it out with posts, to make it look a building site. The more things we pull down the better: it shows the mayor is active. No, wait, good grief, I forgot about that rubbish behind the fence. Forty cartloads of it, at least. What a sordid place this is: the moment one puts up a monument or even a fence they dump all sorts of garbage up against it, devil knows where they get it all from. (*Sighs.*) And another thing, if this Inspector happens to ask any of your men if they've got any complaints, make sure they reply: "No complaints at all, Your Excellency!" And if any of them do want to complain then I'll give them something to complain about afterwards... Oh dear God, I'm a sinner, I'm a wretched sinner (*picks up the hatbox instead of his hat*). But if You pull

us through this one I swear I'll light You the biggest candle You ever saw: I'll sting every swine of a tradesman for a hundredweight of wax. Oh my God! Let's go, Pyotr Ivanovich! (*Puts on the hatbox instead of his hat.*)

CHIEF OF POLICE. Anton Antonovich, that's a box, not a hat.

MAYOR (*flinging it down*). So it is, damn it! And if he asks why they haven't built a chapel for the hospital—the one we got a subsidy for five years ago—don't forget: we started to build one, but it burnt down. I sent in a report about it. Some idiot might forget and say it was never even begun. And tell constable Derzhimorda to keep his fists to himself for a while: his way of keeping order is to give everyone a black eye, whether they've done anything or not. Let's go, Pyotr Ivanovich. (*Goes out and then comes back.*) And for God's sake make sure the soldiers are dressed properly when they're out on the street. Those scoundrels only wear the top half of their uniforms.

Exeunt all.

Scene VI

Anna Andreyevna and Maria Antonovna run on stage.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Where are they? Oh my God ... (*Opens door.*) Anton! Antosha! Antonchik! (*Speak quickly.*) It's all because of you, it's all your fault. I've never seen such a performance: "I must have a pin, I must have a ribbon." (*Runs to window and calls out.*) Anton, where are you going? What? He's arrived? The Inspector? Has he got a moustache? What sort of moustache?

MAYOR (*off*). Later, dear, later.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Later? What do you mean, later? Don't give me your later!.. Just tell me this: is he a colonel? Hey! (*With disdain.*) He's gone. You'll pay for this! You and your, "Mama, mama, wait while I fasten my scarf, it won't take a second." So much for your second! Because of you we've missed everything! Vain little upstart! Just because she hears the postmaster's here she starts prinking and preening in front of the mirror: first on this side and then on that side...

You think he's set his cap for you, but he pulls a face every time your back is turned.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh, do stop fussing, mama! We'll know all about it in a couple of hours anyway.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. A couple of hours! Thank you most kindly! Much obliged, I'm sure. Why not say a month? We'd know even more by then! (*Leans out of window.*) Hey, Avdotya, did you find anything out? You didn't? Silly girl! He shooed you away? Well, so what if he did, you could have asked him all the same. Couldn't find out indeed! No wonder, you think of nothing but men all the time. What? They drove off too quickly? Well, you should have run along behind the droshky! Get a move on now, do you hear, run and find out where they've gone, and see you find out who this visitor is, what he's like—you know! Have a peep through the keyhole and see what colour his eyes are, and come back straight away, do you hear? Now run, faster, faster, faster. (*Still shouting as the curtain falls. Thus the curtain conceals them both, standing at the window.*)

ACT II

Small room at the inn: bed, table, suitcase, empty bottle, boots, clothes-brush, etc.

Scene I

Osip is lying on his master's bed.

OSIP. Gor, stone the crows, I'm that hungry my stomach sounds like a blooming brass band. And we're not getting any nearer home either! What a bind! Nearly two months since we left Petersburg. His lordship's been throwing his money about on the road and now he sits with his tail between his legs doing sod all about it. There would have been plenty enough for the whole trip, but oh no, he has to put on a big act every town we stop. (*Mocking him.*) "I say, my man, scout around and find me the best room they have, will you, an get me the best dinner they have, I can't eat any old rubbish, you know, nothing but the best for me." It'd be all right if he really was somebody, not just a jumped-up clerk! Makes friends with Lord Muck on the road, out come the cards, and here we are stuck in this

dump without a sausage. I'm sick to death of it! Mind you, you can have quite a cushy time in the country—not much public life, I admit, but then it's an easy life. Get yourself a woman, lay about on the stove all day eating pies. Yeach... But let's face it, Petersburg's the place. All you need are a few shekels, and you can live the good life—theatres, dancing dogs, whatever takes your fancy. Everyone talks so refined and polite, they could all be nobles: walk down the arcades, the shopkeepers all call you Sir, take the ferry and find yourself sitting next to a government official, feel like a bit of company, drop round the shops: there some army geezer'll tell you about the camps, what all the stars mean, simple as daylight. Madame the brigadier's missus drops in; and you should see some of them parlourmaids... Fuuah! (*Laughs and shakes his head.*) Genteel's not the word. Everything's all polite and come eel fote in Petersburg. Tired of footing it—take a cab, just like your lordship; don't feel like coughing up the fare?—No trouble, every house what has a front door has a back door too and you beat it so fast the devil himself wouldn't catch you. Only thing about his nibs is: either you're stuffed up to the eyeballs or you're starving to death. Like now for instance. And does he learn? The old man sends him a few nicker, enough to keep going for a while—and stone me if he's not out on the town again: riding around in cabs, up the opera every night, and come the end of the week he sends you off to the flea-market with his new suit. He'll flog the lot, too, right down to his scruffiest jacket and overcoat. He spends a hundred and fifty on a tail-coat—finest English cloth—and blow me if he doesn't flog it for twenty. And his trousers just go for a song! And why? Because he won't work, that's why. You won't catch him in the office, oh no, he has to be swanning round the boulevards and playing cards. I wouldn't want to be in his shoes if the guvnor found out! His being a civil servant won't cut no ice with the guvnor: it'll be up with his shirt-tails and he'd get such a tanning he'd be smarting for days. Let's face it, if you've a job to do, bloody well do it. Now the landlord says no more nosh till we pay for what we've had—and what if we don't pay? (*Sighs.*) Christ, what I wouldn't do right now for a bowl of cabbage soup! I'm that hungry, I could eat a carthorse. Whoops—someone coming, must be his lordship. (*Quickly jumps off bed.*)

Scene II

Enter Khlestakov.

KHLESTAKOV. Here—take this. (*Hands Osip his hat and cane.*) So you've been loafing about on my bed again?

OSIP. Why should I be loafing on your bed? Haven't I never seen a bed before?

KHLESTAKOV. You've been loafing on it, you liar. Look it's all crumpled.

OSIP. I don't need no bed. Don't I know what a bed is? I've got legs, I can stand on them, can't I? What do I want with your bed?

KHLESTAKOV (*walking up and down*). Look in the bag and see if there's any tobacco left.

OSIP. Tobacco! What tobacco? You smoked the last scrap three days ago.

KHLESTAKOV (*paces up and down, twisting his mouth in different ways. Finally says in a loud and determined voice*). Now listen here, Osip!

OSIP. Yes, what is it?

KHLESTAKOV (*loud, but not quite so determined*). You go down.

OSIP. Down where?

KHLESTAKOV (*most undetermined, almost pleading*). Down to the dining room ... and tell them ... they're to give me some lunch!

OSIP. No chance. No point my going.

KHLESTAKOV. Don't you dare disobey me, you oaf!

OSIP. Even if I did go it wouldn't be no good. The landlord said he won't give us no more to eat.

KHLESTAKOV. What impertinence! I won't stand for it!

OSIP. And he also says as he's going to the Mayor: "You been here two weeks without paying," he says. "You and your master," he says, "you're a right pair of crooks, we've seen the likes of you before," he says, "spongers and scoundrels."

KHLESTAKOV. And what are you so pleased about, you rat?!

OSIP. And he says: "If we just let everybody come along and set up house here we'd never get rid of them. I'm telling you straight," he says, "I'll be as good as my word, I'm going straight to the Mayor to have you two put in jail."

KHLESTAKOV. All right, you dolt, that's quite enough. Now go and tell him to send up my lunch. What an uncouth brute!

OSIP. I'd best call him up here to talk to you.

KHLESTAKOV. What do I want to see the landlord for? You tell him yourself...

OSIP. But it's no good...

KHLESTAKOV. Oh for God's sake, go and fetch the landlord then.

Exit Osip.

Scene III

Khlestakov alone.

KHLESTAKOV. It's terrible to be so hungry. I took a bit of a walk, thought it would help, make my appetite go away—but it made no difference, damn it. If only I hadn't gone on the razzle in Penza we'd have had enough money to get home. That infantry captain really rooked me at faro. The hands he kept on dealing himself, the rogue! Sat down for quarter of an hour, and cleaned me right out. All the same I wouldn't half mind another bash at him. Never had a chance. What a dump this town is! Even the shopkeepers won't give you anything on the tick. Mean sods! (*Walks up and down whistling air from* Roberto, *then a popular song, then any old thing.*) Why aren't they coming?

Scene IV

Enter Osip and Waiter.

WAITER. The landlord sent me to see what you would be wanting?

KHLESTAKOV. Well, hello, my dear chap! How are you today?

WAITER. Very well, thanks be to God.

KHLESTAKOV. And how's business? Everything going all right?

WAITER. Yes, thanks be to God, everything's all right.

KHLESTAKOV. Plenty of guests?

WAITER. Plenty to be getting on with, yes.

KHLESTAKOV. Now see here, my dear chap. They haven't brought me my lunch yet, and I've got some urgent business to attend to, so run along and chivvy them a bit, there's a good fellow.

WAITER. The landlord says we're not to serve you no more. What's more, he says he's going to the Mayor to complain about you.

KHLESTAKOV. Complain? Really, my dear fellow, what about? I mean, a chap's got to eat, hasn't he? I'll waste away at this rate! I'm really hungry, I mean that seriously.

WAITER. Yes, sir. But the landlord said: "He's not getting another bite till he's paid for what he's had." Those were his very words.

KHLESTAKOV. But can't you reason with him, explain to him?

WAITER. What must I explain to him?

KHLESTAKOV. Make him understand, I've got to eat. Why worry about the money? The peasant, he thinks if he can go for the odd day without food other people can too, I like that!

WAITER. Very well, I'll tell him. (*Exit with Osip.*)

Scene V

Khlestakov alone.

What'll I do if he says no? I've never been so hungry in my life! Maybe I could flog some clothes ... my trousers perhaps? No: I'll hang on to my Petersburg suit if I have to starve to death in it. What a pity Jochim wouldn't hire me that carriage in Petersburg: it would have been devilish grand to ride home in a carriage—see me driving up like the devil himself to some neighbour's porch, lamps blazing away and Osip perched up behind in livery. I can just imagine all the excitement: "Who is it?" "What is it?" And the footman, all in gold livery, announcing (*drawing himself up, playing the footman*): "Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov presents his card, is Your Lordship receiving?" The louts, they don't even know what "receiving" means. If some goose of a landowner goes visiting round there he just barges into the drawing room, like a bear. I should step up to the pretty daughter: "Mademoiselle, may I..." (*Rubs his hands and scrapes his foot.*) Pfui! (*Spits.*) I'm so hungry I feel sick!

Scene VI

Enter Osip, then Waiter.

KHLESTAKOV. Well?

OSIP. They're bringing lunch.

KHLESTAKOV (*claps his hands and bounces on his chair*). They're bringing lunch! Hooray!

WAITER (*with plates and a napkin*). The landlord says it's the last time.

KHLESTAKOV. The landlord can ... I spit on the landlord! What's that you've got there?

WAITER. Soup and roast.

KHLESTAKOV. What—only two courses?

WAITER. That's it.

KHLESTAKOV. That's absurd! I won't put up with that! You go and ask him what the devil he thinks he's doing!... It's not enough!

WAITER. Landlord says it's too much.

KHLESTAKOV. Why's there no sauce?

WAITER. There ain't none.

KHLESTAKOV. What d'you mean, there ain't none? I saw them making it when I went past the kitchen, oodles of it. And what about the salmon? There were two short little characters tucking into salmon and lots of other goodies this morning in the dining room.

WAITER. Well, there is and there isn't, you might say.

KHLESTAKOV. What do you mean, there isn't?

WAITER. Just isn't any, that's all.

KHLESTAKOV. No salmon, no fish, no rissoles?

WAITER. Well, there is, but only for proper customers.

KHLESTAKOV. You stupid oaf!

WAITER. Yes, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. You horrible little pig... Why should they be given the food and not me? I'm a guest of the hotel too, you know.

WAITER. Well, that's because they're different.

KHLESTAKOV. What do you mean, different?

WAITER. It's quite simple: they pay their bills.

KHLESTAKOV. I'm not going to waste time talking to you, you idiot. (*Ladles out soup and eats.*) What's this? Call

this soup? You've just poured dish-water into a cup: it's got no taste, it stinks. I don't want this, take it away.

WAITER. Certainly. Landlord says, if you don't like it you don't have to eat it.

KHLESTAKOV (*protecting the food with his hands*). No, no, no, no, leave it there, you fool. You may be in the habit of treating your other guests like this: but I wouldn't advise you to try it with me, my friend, I'm a cut above them. (*Eats.*) God, what revolting soup! (*Continues eating.*) I doubt anyone else in the world has ever eaten such slop. Feathers floating in it instead of fat. (*Cuts chicken in soup.*) Hell, what a chicken! Let's try the roast. There's a bit of soup left, Osip, you want it. (*Carves roast.*) What in God's name is this? Not meat, that's for sure.

WAITER. Well, what is it then?

KHLESTAKOV. Devil only knows, but it's most definitely not meat. They must have cooked the kitchen chopper. (*Eats.*) What do they think they're feeding me? The scoundrels, one mouthful's enough to make your jaws ache. (*Pick his teeth.*) Rogues! It's just like bits of bark: look!—won't come out. Probably turn my teeth black. The brigands! (*Wipes his mouth with napkin.*) Well, what else is there?

WAITER. That's the lot.

KHLESTAKOV. What! It's absolutely criminal! Not even any sauce or pastry. The scoundrels! Fleecing travellers, that's what it is!

Waiter clears up and exit with Osip.

Scene VII

KHLESTAKOV. It's just as if I'd not eaten at all; it's only whetted my appetite. If only I had a bit of the ready I could send out for a bun.

OSIP (*enters*). The Mayor's arrived. Making enquiries and asking about you.

KHLESTAKOV (*terrified*). The Mayor? Oh my God! That blasted landlord's complained already! Suppose he really does stick me in prison? Well, I suppose if they're not too rough about it... What am I saying? Prison? I might be seen. There are officers and people outside on the street and there's that pretty little shopkeeper's daughter I swapped a few winks

with. I can't go to prison. What do they think I am? Some sort of tradesman or labourer? (Drawing himself up, and gathering courage.) I'll tell him straight to his face: "How dare you?" I'll say, "How dare—" (*Door-handle turns, Khleastakov goes pale and cringes.*)

Scene VIII

Enter Dobchinsky and Mayor, who stops dead. Mayor and Khlestakov stare at each other for a few moments in terror, eyes popping.

MAYOR (*recovering slightly and standing to attention*). May I offer my salutations, Sir.

KHLESTAKOV (*bowing*). My honour, I'm sure.

MAYOR. Forgive my...

KHLESTAKOV. Not at all.

MAYOR. It is my duty, as the mayor of this town, to ensure that no visitor or person of rank be subjected to any inconvenience...

KHLESTAKOV (*stammering a bit at first, but speaking loudly by the end of his speech*). But what am I to do! It's not my fault ... I'll pay, I promise I will... They'll send me some money from home. (*Bobchinsky peeps round door.*) The landlord's more to blame: the meat he serves up tastes like old boots, and as for the soup... God knows what he puts in the soup, I had to chuck it out of the window. The man lets me starve for days on end... And the tea! Such extraordinary tea! It smells of fish. And then why should I ... I mean, fancy that!

MAYOR (*timidly*). Please forgive me, I'm really not to blame. There's always fresh meat in the market, brought in by honest and sober tradesmen from Kholmogory. I really don't know where he could have got meat like that. But if things aren't to your liking... Might I perhaps suggest that you come with me to other quarters?

KHLESTAKOV. No, I won't go. I know what you mean by other quarters, you mean jail. You've got no right, how dare you!... I'm—I'm a government official from Petersburg! (*Blustering.*) I, I, I...

MAYOR (*aside*). Oh my God, he's in a rage! He's found out everything! Those blasted shopkeepers must have beaten me to it!

KHLESTAKOV (*gathering courage*). You can come here with a whole regiment, and I won't budge! I'll go straight to the Minister. (*Thumps table.*) What do you think ... why should you...

MAYOR (*trembling all over, stands to attention*). Please sir, have mercy, don't ruin me! I've a wife, small children... Don't ruin us all.

KHLESTAKOV. I won't go! What's that got to do with it? I've got to go to jail because you've got a wife and children? I like that!

Bobchinsky peeps round door and shrinks back, terrified.

No, thank you humbly, I won't go!

MAYOR (*trembling*). It was my inexperience, honest to God, it was only my inexperience. And my miserable salary. You can judge for yourself: my official pay is not even enough for tea and sugar. And if there were a few bribes, they were nothing of any consequence: something for the table, or a piece of cloth for a coat. And as for that story about the sergeant's widow—the one who keeps a stall at the market—that I'm supposed to have flogged, it's slander, pure slander! Fabricated by my enemies. Those people! You wouldn't believe it ... I go in danger of my life.

KHLESTAKOV. So what? All that's got nothing to do with me. (*Pensively.*) Why are you giving me all this stuff about enemies and sergeant's widows? Sergeant's widows are one thing, but don't try and flog me. The very idea! Who do you think you are? I'll pay my bill, I'll pay it all. It's just that at the moment I've got no money! That's why I'm stuck here like this, because I haven't got a bean on me.

MAYOR (*aside*). My, this is a sly one! He's cast his line all right ... but it's all so foggy you just don't know which way to take it. Well, we might as well take the plunge. What will be, will be. (*Aloud.*) Sir, if you happen to be in need of a temporary accommodation, allow me to be at your service. It's my duty to assist our visitors.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, I could do with a loan! Then I could pay off the landlord at once... Just 200 rubles would do it, less, even.

MAYOR (*producing banknotes*). Here you are, here's 200 exactly. Please don't trouble to count it.

KHLESTAKOV. Much obliged. I'll send it back the moment I get to my estate. I always pay up on the nail ... I can see you are a real gentleman. Things will be quite different now.

MAYOR (*aside*). Well thank God for that! He took it. And I managed to slip him 400 instead of 200.

KHLESTAKOV. Osip!

Enter Osip.

Fetch that waiter back here. (*To Mayor and Dobchinsky.*) But why are you standing? Please sit down, I implore you. (*To Dobchinsky.*) Pray sit, my dear sir.

MAYOR. Don't worry, we're quite happy to stand.

KHLESTAKOV. No, sir, I beg you, I see now what generous and sincere people you are; and to think that before I was under the impression that you had come to... (*To Dobchinsky.*) Please, sit down!

Mayor and Dobchinsky sit, Bobchinsky peeps round door, listening.

MAYOR (*aside*). Have to be a bit bolder. He wants to stay incognito, I see. All right, we can play charades too: we'll pretend we really have no idea who he is. (*Aloud.*) We—that is, Pyotr Ivanovich Dobchinsky here, one of our local landowners, and myself—were just walking past on business, and we popped into the hotel to find out how they were treating our visitors, because, you see, I'm not the sort of Mayor who leaves everything to look after itself. Not only in the line of duty, but as befits a Christian I like to ensure that a kind welcome is accorded to every passer-by, and in this case I have been rewarded by the pleasure of making such a distinguished acquaintance.

KHLESTAKOV. My pleasure too. If it hadn't been for you I might have been stuck in this hole for quite a while, I must admit. I really didn't know how I was going to foot the bill.

MAYOR (*aside*). Just listen to that! Didn't know how he was going to foot the bill! (*Aloud.*) May I be so bold as to enquire in which direction you would be intending to travel?

KHLESTAKOV. I'm heading for Saratov, for my estate.

MAYOR (*aside, with ironic expression*). Saratov, he says! And not a blush! Phew, you have to keep your wits about you

with this one! (*Aloud.*) Ah yes, a fine occupation, travel. Of course, on the one hand, there's always the inconvenience of changing horses, but then they do say it exercises the mind. Do I presume you would be travelling more for the purposes of pleasure?

KHLESTAKOV. No, my father's sent for me. The old boy's got himself in a lather because I haven't earned myself any promotions. He thinks decorations grow on trees in Petersburg. I'd just like to see him sweating in an office all day.

MAYOR (*aside*). Talk about laying it on thick! Dragging in his old father—I ask you! (*Aloud.*) And would you be staying there for a while, sir?

KHLESTAKOV. I really don't know. The old duffer's as stubborn as a mule and just as stupid. I shall tell him straight out: say what you like, I can't live anywhere except Petersburg. Why should I waste my life away among peasants, anyway? Nowadays one has different needs. I shall say: my soul aspires to higher things.

MAYOR (*aside*). A fine web he's spinning! One lie after the next and he never comes unstuck! And he's nothing to look at—so puny you could squash him with your thumbnail. I'll catch him out somehow, though. (*Aloud.*) Of course you're absolutely right. What can one do in these backwoods? Look at me, for instance: slave away all day for my country, work through the night, spare no effort—but where's the reward? (*Looks round the room.*) This room looks a little damp to me.

KHLESTAKOV. Damp? The room's a disgrace, and you should see the bedbugs: they bite like dogs.

MAYOR. Good God! Such a distinguished visitor and what is he subjected to? Bedbugs, which should never have been created in the first place. A little dark too, isn't it, I should think?

KHLESTAKOV. Black as hell. The landlord's adopted a policy of not issuing candles. Get an urge to read a book, or to do a bit of writing myself and I can't, it's too dark.

MAYOR. I wonder if I might ... No, it's too presumptuous of me.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, what?

MAYOR. No really, I can't. I'm unworthy.

KHLESTAKOV. But unworthy of what?

MAYOR. You see... There is an excellent room for you in

my house, very light, quiet... But no, I can't, it would be too great an honour. Please don't be angry, I beg you, I was only trying to be of service.

KHLESTAKOV. But on the contrary, dear fellow, I should be delighted. I'd much rather be in a private home than remain in this flophouse.

MAYOR. And I shall be delighted too! My wife will be quite overjoyed! That's the way I am, hospitable, always have been ever since I was a child: most especially when the guest is a man of learning like yourself. Please don't think I'm trying to flatter you. I always speak straight from the heart.

KHLESTAKOV. Sincere thanks. I'm just like you—can't abide hypocrites. I must say I really warm to your frankness and cordiality. When all's said and done what more can one ask in life than devotion and respect. Respect and devotion.

Scene IX

Enter Waiter accompanied by Osip. Bobchinsky peeps round door.

WAITER. You called, sir?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, give me the bill.

WAITER. I gave it to you the other day.

KHLESTAKOV. I can't keep track of all your stupid bills. Just tell me how much it is.

WAITER. Well, you had the full table d'hôte the first day, and then the next you had smoked salmon and after that everything was on tick.

KHLESTAKOV. Idiot! I don't want menus, just the bill.

MAYOR. I beg you, don't let it upset you, it can wait. (*To waiter.*) You clear off, I'll see to it...

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, of course, that's a much better idea. (*Puts money away.*)

Exit Waiter. Bobchinsky peeps round door.

Scene X

MAYOR. I wonder if you'd care to look over some of the public buildings in our town? The charitable institutions and so on?

KHLESTAKOV. Whatever for?

MAYOR. Why, to see how we run the place, how we see to our responsibilities...

KHLESTAKOV. Of course, with pleasure.

Bobchinsky's head peeps round door.

MAYOR. You might also take a glance at the district school, see how we further the cause of science.

KHLESTAKOV. By all means.

MAYOR. And then you might take a look at the prison, visit the cells—just to see how we keep our criminals.

KHLESTAKOV. Why the prison? I'd much rather look over the charitable institutions.

MAYOR. Of course, of course, anything you say. Will you take your carriage, or will you do me the honour of coming in my droshky?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, I might as well come with you.

MAYOR (*to Dobchinsky*). No room for you now, Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. Never mind, I'll be all right.

MAYOR (*aside to Dobchinsky*). And listen, I want you to run, and I mean run at full speed, with two messages, one for my wife, another for Zemlanika at the charitable institutions. (*To Khlestakov.*) May I take the liberty, sir, of writing a few lines to my wife so that she can start preparing for the arrival of our distinguished guest?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, why should you bother?... In fact there's some ink here, but I don't know about paper... Will this bill do?

MAYOR. Perfectly. (*Writes, muttering to himself.*) We'll see how things work out after a good lunch and a fat bottle of wine! We'll give him some of that local Madeira: looks harmless enough but it'd floor an elephant. (*Hands note to Dobchinsky who goes towards the door. At this moment the door flies off its hinges and Bobchinsky, who has been eavesdropping on the other side, lands on the stage on top of it. General exclamations of alarm. Bobchinsky picks himself up.*)

KHLESTAKOV. I say, have you hurt yourself?

BOBCHINSKY. No, no, it's nothing. Please don't trouble yourself, just a little scratch on my nose—here! I'll run over to Dr. Hiebner for one of his plasters—that'll fix it in no time.

MAYOR (*very cross with Bobchinsky. To Khlestakov*). Take no notice, it's nothing. Please allow me, Your Excellency. Your man can bring your luggage. (*To Osip.*) Bring everything round to my house, will you, my dear fellow, anyone will show you the way. No, please sir, after you! (*Shows Khlestakov out and follows him, but turns round to scold Bobchinsky.*) Trust you! Couldn't you find anywhere better to fall on your face? What a stupid thing to do! (*Exit followed by Bobchinsky.*)

Curtain

ACT III

Room of first act.

Scene I

Anna Andreyevna, Maria Antonovna standing by the window in the same position.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Just look at that, a whole hour we've waited, and all because of you and your stupid prinking and preening: you're as ready as you'll ever be, but you're still fussing away. I should never have listened to you in the first place. Oooh, it's maddening! There's not a soul to be seen in the streets—you'd think the whole town was dead.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Really, Mama, we'll know everything in a minute! Avdotya's bound to come soon. (*Leans out of window and screams.*) Mama, look! Someone's coming, there, at the end of the street.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Where? I can't see anyone. You're always imagining things. Oh yes, so there is. Who is it though? Short little man, in a frock-coat... Who can it be? It's simply infuriating! Who on earth is it?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. It's Dobchinsky, Mama.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Dobchinsky, my foot! You and your fantasies!... Of course it's not Dobchinsky. (*Waves her kerchief.*) Hey, you, come here, quickly!

MARIA ANTONOVNA. It is Dobchinsky, Mama.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Shut up. You're only saying it to annoy me. I tell you it isn't Dobchinsky.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. There! Can't you see it's Dobchinsky?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well, so maybe it is Dobchinsky, I can see him now, so what are you arguing about? (*Shouting out of the window.*) Come on! Can't you run a bit faster? Well, where are they all? What? No, tell me now. What? Very stern? What? My husband! (*Steps back from window, annoyed.*) The man's an idiot: he won't say anything till he gets indoors!

Scene 11

Enter Dobchinsky.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. I hope you're thoroughly ashamed of yourself, Pyotr Ivanovich. I was relying on you in particular, as a decent person. But no. Off they all go and you after them, and does anyone think of telling me what's going on? You should be ashamed! To think that I was godmother to your little Vanechka and Lizanka.

DOBCHINSKY. As God's my witness, ma'am, I've run myself out of breath to get here now. Goodday to you, Maria Antonovna!

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Goodday, Pyotr Ivanovich.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well? Now tell us all about it.

DOBCHINSKY. Anton Antonovich sent you a note.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But what is he? A general?

DOBCHINSKY. Well no, not a general but you'd think he was one: so cultured, and such an imposing manner!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Then it must be the man in the letter.

DOBCHINSKY. The very one. And it was me that discovered him—me and Pyotr Ivanovich!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But tell me, what happened?

DOBCHINSKY. Well, praise God, so far everything's going smoothly. Mind you, he gave Anton Antonovich a hard time of it to start with. He got very angry, complained about the hotel, and he wasn't going with him and he wouldn't go to prison on his account. But then, when he realized it wasn't Anton Antonovich's fault and the two of them got chatting, he soon calmed down thank God, and things started to look up. Now they've gone off to look at the hospital... To begin with,

Anton Antonovich was even wondering if someone had informed on him, and I was a bit jittery myself.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But what have you got to worry about, you're not in service?

DOBCHINSKY. Well, it's just that with a brass hat like him you feel scared anyway.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now really... But what a lot of nonsense; tell me though, what's he like? Is he old or young?

DOBCHINSKY. Oh quite young, a young man, about 23, but he talks just like an old man: "Very well," he says, "we'll have a look at this, and that too" (*waving his arms*), all frightfully upper crust. "I like to do a bit of reading and writing," he says, "but I can't here," he says, "because this room's a trifle dark."

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But what's he like? I mean, is he fair or dark?

DOBCHINSKY. More sort of brown, but with such quick eyes, like a hawk's—make you feel quite uneasy.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What's this note all about? (*Reads.*) "I hasten to inform you, my dear, that I appeared at first to be in great peril but trusting in God's mercy for two pickled cucumber specials and half a portion of caviar one ruble twenty-five..." (*Stops.*) I can't make head or tail of this: what's all this about pickled cucumbers and caviar?

DOBCHINSKY. He was in such a hurry he wrote it on a piece of used paper, it must have been a hotel bill.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Oh, a bill, I see. (*Continues reading.*) "But, trusting in God's mercy, all things will be well. Quickly prepare a room for our distinguished guest—the one with yellow wallpaper. Don't trouble about dinner, we'll eat at the hospital, but order a good lot of first rate wine; send down to Abdulin's for some of his best stuff and tell him that if he doesn't hand it over I'll ransack his cellar. I kiss your hand, my sweet, ever yours, Anton." Oh my God! Now we're really going to have to hurry! Hey Mishka, you there? Mishka!

DOBCHINSKY(*runs to door and shouts*). Mishka! Mishka! Mishka!

Enter Mishka.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Listen: run to Abdulin's ... wait, I'll give you a list. (*Sits at table, writes, talking all the while.*)

Give this list to Sidor and tell him to hurry along to Abdulin's and bring back some wine. And then I want you to go and get the spare room ready for a very special guest. Put in a bed, and a washbasin and all the rest of it.

DOBCHINSKY. I think I better run along now, Anna Andreyevna, and see how the inspection's going, you know?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Get along then, I'm not stopping you.

Exit Dobchinsky.

Scene III

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now Masha, we must think about what we're going to wear. He's used to Petersburg fashions: we mustn't make ourselves a laughing stock. I think your pale blue dress with the little flounces would be the most appropriate.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh Mama, not the pale blue one! I do hate it, and Mrs. Lyapkin-Tyapkin goes about in pale blue, and so does the Zemlanika girl. I'd much rather wear my floral one.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Your floral one! You know you're only saying that to be difficult. Your blue one will be best because I am going to wear my primrose; you know how I love my primrose one.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh no Mama! Not primrose. Primrose doesn't suit you at all!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. And why not, may I ask?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Of course it doesn't. You have to have dark eyes to wear primrose.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well there's a thing! And now she's trying to tell me I haven't got dark eyes! And this when she knows that I tell my fortune by the Queen of Clubs.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. But Mama, you're really much more like the Queen of Hearts.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What utter rubbish! I was never the Queen of Hearts! (*Goes off hurriedly with Maria Antonovna, still talking. Offstage.*) Really, me the Queen of Hearts! What will she think of next?

Doors open as they go out and Mishka sweeps out the rubbish. Osip enters by another door carrying a trunk on his head.

Scene IV

OSIP. Where d'you want this, then?

MISHKA. This way, old fellow, in here.

OSIP. Hang on a jiff while I get me breath back. What a dog's life! You can't go far on an empty stomach!

MISHKA. Well, tell us, old man, is the general coming soon?

OSIP. What general?

MISHKA, Why, your master, of course.

OSIP. My master? What do you call him, general?

MISHKA. Well isn't he a general?

OSIP. Oh, he's a general all right, general and a half.

MISHKA. You mean he's more than a real general?

OSIP. You bet!

MISHKA. Well I'll be blowed! No wonder they're making such a fuss about him, then.

OSIP. Look here, son: I can see you've got a head on your shoulders, how about fixing me a spot of grub?

MISHKA. There won't be anything ready for you yet, dad. You wouldn't be wanting something plain, but the moment your master sits down to his dinner they'll give you the same as what he gets.

OSIP. What would you mean by something plain?

MISHKA. Cabbage soup, porridge, or meat pies.

OSIP. Well, just go and get me some cabbage soup, porridge and pie then! I don't mind eating plain for a change. Come on, let's shift this thing. Is there another way out, there?

MISHKA. Yes.

They carry trunk into side room.

Scene V

Constables open double doors. Enter Khlestakov, followed by the Mayor, the Warden of Charities, the Inspector of Schools, Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky with plaster on his nose. The Mayor points out a scrap of paper on the floor to the Constables: they leap over and whip it up, colliding with one another in their haste.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, that's quite some hospital! I must say I'm impressed by the way you show your visitors round. In the other towns they never showed me a thing.

MAYOR. If I may dare to suggest an explanation, in other towns the officials are often more concerned with, so to speak, lining their pockets. But I must confess that here we think of very little else but how to earn the approval of our superiors by our vigilance and good example.

KHLESTAKOV. Excellent lunch. Completely gorged myself. Do you lunch like that every day?

MAYOR. On the contrary, specially cooked for our charming guest.

KHLESTAKOV. I do love eating, I must say. But then what's life for, but to cull the blooms of pleasure. What was that delicious fish?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*scurrying up*). Trout meunière, Your Excellency.

KHLESTAKOV. Really? Very tasty. Where was it we ate—in the hospital, right?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Quite right, sir, in the charitable institution.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, I remember seeing some beds there. Didn't seem to be many patients though. Have they all recovered?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. About a dozen left, the rest have recovered. It's the way the place is run. Since I took over the management—you may find this hard to believe, but all the patients have just been recovering like flies. The moment they set foot in the hospital they feel fit as a fiddle. Not so much through medication as through good management.

MAYOR. But all that's nothing compared to the duties of a mayor. So many things to deal with: cleaning the streets, repairs, renovations ... enough problems to flummox the cleverest of men, but, thank the Lord, it's all in order here. I can think of mayors whose only concern would be that little bit on the side but no, as God's my judge, when I lie down to sleep, my prayer is "Lord God, please let my superiors see my zeal and be pleased with me!" Whether they choose to reward me or not, that's up to them, of course, but at least I'll rest easy. When order reigns in the town, the streets are swept, the convicts well looked after, not too many drunkards about...

What more could I want? It's not decorations I'm after. They're attractive to some, I know, but for me, virtue is its own reward.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*aside*). Just listen to that, the loafer! Talk about the gift of the gab!

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, very true! I must confess I dabble in philosophy a bit myself. An occasional bit of prose ... the odd stanza or two, you know the sort of thing.

BOBCHINSKY (*to Dobchinsky*). So perfectly true, Pyotr Ivanovich! The way he puts things is so ... you can tell he's studied the sciences, can't you?

KHLESTAKOV. But tell me, don't you have any amusements in this town? Don't you ever get together for a game of cards?

MAYOR (*aside*). Oho, my fine fellow, I can see what you're sniffing at! (*Aloud.*) God forbid! I wouldn't stand for that sort of thing in our town! I've never picked up a card in my life. Wouldn't know what to do with it if I did. I can't even look at them calmly, and if I should be unlucky enough to see a king of diamonds or something like that I can literally feel the bile rising from my stomach. I built a house of cards one day, to amuse the children, you know, and had nightmares about the damned things all night! Heaven help us! To think of all the valuable time people waste on them!

HEADMASTER (*aside*). He only took a hundred rubles off me last night, the scoundrel.

MAYOR. My time is better spent in the service of the community.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, I don't think that you're really being quite fair. It depends on the view you take of a thing. Of course, if you're the sort of chap who sticks just when you should treble your stake... No, no, there's a lot of fun can be gained from a hand of cards.

Scene VI

Enter Anna Andreyevna and Maria Antonovna.

MAYOR. Your Excellency, allow me to introduce my wife ... my daughter.

KHLESTAKOV (*bowing*). I am overjoyed, madame, to enjoy ... so to speak ... the pleasure of your company.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Our pleasure is the greater, in having such a distinguished guest.

KHLESTAKOV (*giving himself airs*). Permit me to insist, madame, that the pleasure is entirely mine.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Really sir, you're such a flatterer. Won't you please be seated?

KHLESTAKOV. Merely to stand beside you is pleasure enough, madame, but if you absolutely insist, I shall sit. (*Sits.*) What bliss to be seated at your fair side.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But no, no, you cannot really mean it. There cannot be much in these environs to compare with your life in Petersburg?

KHLESTAKOV. The comparison is odious in the extreme, I assure you, madame. Accustomed to life as one is, comprenez-vous, in the haute monde, to suddenly find oneself en route: dirty inns, a cultural desert ... I must admit, if it hadn't been for this happy occasion, which (*glancing at Anna Andreyevna and posturing*) ... makes it worthwhile...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But still, it must be most disagreeable for you.

KHLESTAKOV. At this moment, madame, I find it the opposite of disagreeable.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Oh sir! You flatter me, I'm sure.

KHLESTAKOV. And what more fitting object could one find for flattery?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But I am a country person.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah! The country, to be sure, has its little ... hills and valleys. But it's true one can't compare it with Petersburg! Ah, Petersburg! That's the life! You may be thinking that I'm just a copy clerk, but in fact the head of my department and I are on the friendliest footing. He'll clap me on the back, just like that, and say: "Come round to dinner, old sport!" I just pop into the office for two minutes at a time to say: "do this, do that!" and the copy clerk, such a rat, scratches away, tr, tr... They offered me a promotion once, but, I thought, what's the use? and turned it down. And the porter's forever chasing after me with his brush: "Allow me, sir, I'll just give your boots a bit of a shine". (*To the Mayor.*) Why are you all standing up, gentlemen? Do please sit!

together MAYOR. We know our place, Your Excellency.
WARDEN OF CHARITIES. We'd rather stand.
INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Please don't trouble yourself.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh for heaven's sake, sit down.

They scurry to sit.

I don't hold with standing on ceremony. On the contrary: I always go out of my way to be inconspicuous. But it's impossible, quite impossible! As soon as I turn the corner they all start saying: "Look: it's Ivan Alexandrovich!" Do you know, once they took me for the Commander-in-Chief. The soldiers all came rushing out of their guardroom and presented arms. And afterwards their officer—who's incidentally a very close friend of mine—said to me: "You know, old chap, we were all quite sure you were the C-in-C!"

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Good heavens, who would have thought it!

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes, I'm known all round. I know all the pretty actresses, of course. I write the odd little vaudeville for them, you know. Yes, I know a lot of literary types too. Pushkin and I are great chums. I bump into him every so often: "How's it going, Push, old boy?" I say. "Middling, old chap," he says, "fair to middling." Old Pushkin's quite a wag, I can tell you.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. So you're a writer too? How splendid it must be to be so talented! Do you write for the magazines?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes, I do a bit for the magazines. But then I've knocked off so many things: *Roberto Il Diabolo, The Marriage of Figaro, Norma*. I can't even remember what half of them are called. It all happened quite by chance, actually. Those blasted theatre managers were always after me: "Do please write us something, old fellow." So I thought, "What the hell: I'll give it a try." Do you know, I sat down that very same evening and wrote the lot. Yes, well, I've always had a great facility for thought. All that stuff by Baron Brambeus, *The Frigate of Hope, Moscow Telegraph...* They're mine really.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. You don't mean to say that you're Baron Brambeus?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, I correct all their bits and pieces at one time or another. Smirdin gives me 40,000 a year for it.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Tell me, would *Yuri Miloslavsky* be yours as well?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes, that's one of mine.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. There! I knew it must be.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. But, Mama, it says on the cover that it was written by Mr. Zagoskin.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. You would have to make trouble, wouldn't you?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, of course, it is by Zagoskin. But there's another *Yuri Miloslavsky*, and that one's by me.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well I'm certain it was yours I was reading—it's so beautifully written!

KHLESTAKOV. I must admit, I just live for literature. I keep the best house in Petersburg. Everybody knows it: "That's Ivan Alexandrovich's house," they say. (*Addressing all.*) Gentlemen, if you're ever in Petersburg I beg you to do me the kindness of visiting me. I give balls too, you know.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. I can just imagine how grand and refined they must be!

KHLESTAKOV. They're really quite beyond description. I serve up a watermelon, for example, costing all of 700 rubles. I have soup brought in the pot by steamer from Paris, and the aroma when you lift the lid—out of this world. I'm always at a ball somewhere or other. Or else we make up a four for whist: the Foreign Minister, the French Ambassador, the English, the German Ambassador and me. Sometimes we keep on playing until we're ready to drop. I just have enough strength to dash up the stairs to my fourth-floor flat and say to the cook: "Take my coat, Mavrushka..." Good heavens, what am I saying—I mean the first floor of course. Why, the staircase alone is worth... And the hall, in the morning, simply teeming and buzzing with counts and princes, even before I wake up. Bzz, bzz ... just like a swarm of bees. Sometimes the Prime Minister himself looks in.

The others come to their feet, awestruck.

I'm even addressed on my dispatches: "His Excellency." I was in charge of a department once for a while. Queer business it was, the director simply vanished into thin air,

no one knew where. So, of course, there was the usual bickering about who should stand in for him. All sorts of generals volunteered but as soon as they got a taste of it—no, it was too difficult. At first sight you'd think the job was easy—but take a closer look—the devil of a business. So in the end they had to send for me. They sent messengers all over the city—messengers, couriers, errand-boys—you've no idea. Altogether 35,000 messengers. "Well, what's the problem," I asked. "Ivan Alexandrovich, come and take charge of the department!" I must admit, I was a bit taken aback. They caught me in my dressing gown. I wanted to turn it down but then I thought it might get to the ears of His Majesty and I didn't want to blot my copybook... "All right," I said "I'll do it if you insist, but I'm warning you, none of your lip now! You have to be on your toes with me... Or else... And shall I tell you, the moment I walked into that department, you'd have thought there had been an earthquake: they were all trembling in their boots. Every one of them.

The Mayor and his crew shake with fear. Khlestakov gets more worked up still.

No, I'm not to be trifled with. I put the fear of God into them. Even the Cabinet's scared stiff of me. And I should think so too! I'm like that! I don't take no for an answer. That's what I tell them all. I know my own mind, I do. No doors are barred to me. I drop in at the Palace every day. Tomorrow they're promoting me to Field-Marsh... (*Slips and almost sprawls on the floor, but officials catch him and support him respectfully.*)

MAYOR (*stepping up, shaking from head to foot, can hardly speak*). Woo ... woo ...

KHLESTAKOV (*quickly and abruptly.*) Well, what is it?

MAYOR. Wooya...

KHLESTAKOV. I can't understand a word you're saying, it's all rubbish.

MAYOR. Wooya ... exency.. excellency like to rest? Room's ready and everything you need.

KHLESTAKOV. What rubbish! Don't need a rest... Well, all right. I suppose, if you like. ...A very good lunch, gentlemen. Very good. Well done. (*Declaims.*) Meunière! Meunière! (*Staggers into side room helped by Mayor.*)

Scene VII

BOBCHINSKY (*to Dobchinsky*). Now there's a man for you, Pyotr Ivanovich! That's what it means to be a real man! I've never been in the presence of such an important personage before! I almost died of fright. What would you say his rank was?

DOBCHINSKY. Oh, I should think almost a general.

BOBCHINSKY. A general! A general couldn't even unloose his shoes. The generalissimo at least. Did you hear the way he put the wind up the cabinet? Come on, let's run and tell Lyapkin-Tyapkin and Korobkin. Excuse us, Anna Andreyevna.

DOBCHINSKY. Excuse us, ma'am!

Exeunt Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*to Inspector of Schools*). I'm terrified, simply terrified—and I don't know what of. We're not even in our uniforms. What if he comes back to his senses and sends off a report to Petersburg? (*Exit with Headmaster, pensively.*) Excuse us, ma'am.

Scene VIII

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What a charming man!

MARIA ANTONOVNA. What a darling!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But such refined manners! You can see he's a real person of culture. Such style and finesse! Oh it's superb! I simply adore young men like that! I'm quite overcome! And what's more he was rather taken with me, I noticed he couldn't take his eyes off me!

MARIA ANTONOVNA. It was me he was looking at, mama.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now please, my dear, no more of your nonsense today. I haven't time for it.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. No, mama, really he was!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Heavens above, girl, will you never stop picking quarrels! What would he be looking at you for? What earthly reason would he have for looking at you?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I tell you he was looking at me.

When he started talking about his books he looked straight at me, and then when he was talking about playing whist with the ambassadors he looked at me too.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well perhaps he glanced in your direction but it was only politeness: "Ah yes, 'bout time I had a look at her..."

Scene IX

Enter Mayor on tiptoe.

MAYOR. Shh! Shh!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Why?

MAYOR. I wish we hadn't got him drunk. Even if only half of what he said is true? (*Thinks.*) And why shouldn't it be true? The truth always slips out when one's had a few. Of course he's embroidered it a bit, but then you never hear a speech these days without a few lies in it. Plays cards with ministers, calls at the Palace... In fact, the more you think about it... My God, it makes my head spin; I feel as if I'm perched on the top of a steeple, or standing on a scaffold.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well I wasn't a bit frightened of him: I just saw in him a man of breeding and culture, and I don't care a straw about his rank.

MAYOR. Pshaw! Women! That's the long and the short of it. Fripperies and tripperies are all you can think of. There's no knowing what you'll blurt out next, and it'll be my head on the block not yours! Carrying on with him like that! As if he were some common-or-garden Dobchinsky!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. I would advise you not to concern yourself on that account. We can manage perfectly well, thank you. (*Looks at daughter.*)

MAYOR. Oh there's no use talking to you! What a kettle of fish! I can hardly think straight for fear! (*Opens door and talks through it.*) Mishka, run and call those two constables here, they're somewhere out by the gate. (*After brief silence.*) It's a rum business all the same. He's not even anything much to look at, so thin and scrawny—you'd never guess who he was! If he was a military man you'd spot him for what he is, but in a frock-coat he looks like a fly with its wings clipped. Though I must say he put on a grand performance at the inn

this morning. All that posturing and la-de-dah—I'd never have seen through him. But he gave himself away in the end. These youngsters can never keep their mouths shut for long.

Scene X

Enter Osip. They dash towards him, beckoning him.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Ah—do come here, my good man!

MAYOR. Hush, you! Well? Well? Is he asleep?

OSIP. Not quite, just having a bit of a yawn and a stretch.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Tell me, what's your name?

OSIP. Osip, ma'am.

MAYOR (*to wife and daughter*). Now that's quite enough from you! (*To Osip.*) Tell me, my good man, did they feed you properly?

OSIP. Yes, thank you, Your Honour, they did. Very well, too.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now tell me this. At home, I imagine, there'd be quite a number of counts and princes visiting your master?

OSIP (*aside*). What should I say? Seeing as how they fed me so well, they might feed me even better. (*Aloud.*) Oh yes, ma'am, we get them all, counts too.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. He's very handsome, your master, Osip dear!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now tell me, Osip, is your master...

MAYOR. That's quite enough! You're just interfering with your idle chatter. Tell me, my man...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What's your master's rank?

OSIP. Oh, the usual sort of rank.

MAYOR. For God's sake, you and your stupid questions! Can't you see that we have a serious matter to discuss? Now tell me, about your master, is he really strict? Does he give a lot of stick?

OSIP. Oh yes, he's very keen on order. He likes things just so.

MAYOR. I must say, I like your face. You look like a good chap to me. Well now...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Tell me, Osip, does he go about in uniform back home, or...

MAYOR. Shut up, will you, you windbags! There's a man's life at stake here... (*To Osip.*) Listen, my friend, I've taken a real liking to you. Now an extra glass of tea is always welcome when one's travelling in this cold weather. Here's a couple of rubles for your trouble.

OSIP (*taking money*). Thanking you kindly. May God reward you for helping a poor man.

MAYOR. Good, good, glad to be of service. Now what...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What sort of eyes does your master like best, Osip?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Osip darling, hasn't your master got the sweetest little nose!

MAYOR. Stop that, now! Let me speak. (*To Osip.*) Now tell me, my friend, what sort of things does your master notice, you know, what does he like when he's travelling?

OSIP. Well, it's all according to how he looks at things. Most of all he likes to be well looked after, and well entertained.

MAYOR. Well looked after, eh?

OSIP. Yes, he likes that. Now take me, I'm only a serf, but he always sees to it that I'm well treated. Swear to God! Sometimes we'll just be leaving a place and he'll say to me: "Well, Osip, did they look after you well?" "Rotten, Your Honour," I'll say. "Indeed! So he's a bad host, Osip. Just remind me of his name when we get home." But usually I think: what the hell. I'm an easy-going sort of bloke, Your Honour.

MAYOR. You're a good man, Osip, and you talk good sense. I gave you something for a cup of tea, didn't I? Let me give you a bit more for a bun.

OSIP. You're too generous, Your Honour. (*Puts money away.*) I'll drink your health.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Come to my room, Osip. I've got a little something for you too.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Osip, dear Osip ... kiss your master for me!

Slight cough heard from Khlestakov in other room.

MAYOR. Shh! (*Goes on tiptoe. Everyone talks in a whis-*

per.) For God's sake—we mustn't make a sound! Run along now, you two, we've had enough of you.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Let's go, Masha! There's something I want to tell you that I noticed about our guest, but it'll have to wait till we're alone.

MAYOR. Those women'd talk the leg off a donkey. (*Turning to Osip.*) Now, my friend...

Scene XI

Enter Derzhimorda and Svistunov.

MAYOR. You clumsy bears, clumping in here with your boots! Like someone unloading a cartload of logs! Where the devil have you been gallivanting?

DERZHIMORDA. Acting upon instructions received.

MAYOR. Quiet, will you! (*Claps his hand over Derzhimorda's mouth.*) Cawing like a crow! (*Imitates him.*) "Acting upon instructions received"! Loud-mouthed oaf! (*To Osip.*) Now, my friend, you run along and get things ready for your master. Ask for anything in the house you want.

Exit Osip.

And as for you two—go and stand by the front door and don't move, not an inch. And don't let anyone in, especially not those damned tradesmen! If you so much as let one of them in, I'll... The moment you see one of them come near with a petition, or even looking like the sort of person who might have a petition, grab him by the scruff of his neck and boot him out! Like this! (*Demonstrates with a kick.*) You hear? Now get on with it! Shh!... Shhh!... (*Exit on tiptoe after constables.*)

ACT IV

Same room in Mayor's house.

Scene I

Enter cautiously, on tiptoe: the Judge, Warden of Charities, Postmaster, Inspector of Schools, Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky, all in full-dress uniform. Entire scene conducted in low voices.

JUDGE (*arranges them all in a semi-circle*). Look, for heaven's sake, gentlemen, hurry up and get into a line. And

let's have a bit of discipline, that's right. Don't forget this is a man who visits at the palace, God help us, and tears strips off the Cabinet! Now then, dressing from the right, commence. No, no, you come to this end, Pyotr Ivanovich, and you, Pyotr Ivanovich, go to that end.

Both Pyotr Ivanoviches scurry on tiptoe

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. It's up to you, but I think we should arrange something.

JUDGE. Arrange what?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Well, you know what I mean.

JUDGE. Slip him a couple?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Well yes, even slip him a couple.

JUDGE. Too damned dangerous! He's a public figure, he might raise the roof. Though we could disguise it a bit—maybe say it was a sort of donation from the local gentry towards some public monument.

POSTMASTER. Or we could say: "Look here, this is some money that's come through the post and we don't know who it belongs to."

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. You watch he doesn't send you through the post to a rather distant province! This isn't the right way to go about it in a well-run community. Why are we all here in a squadron? We ought to be paying our respects one at a time, so we each get a sort of ... er ...tête-à-tête with him, and what the ears don't hear and so on... That's how things are done in a well-run society. And I think you should go first, Ammos Fyodorovich.

JUDGE. Me? No I think you should be first. After all our distinguished visitor has been wined and dined in your hospital.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Actually, Luka Lukich would be more appropriate, representing science and the enlightenment of youth.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. I couldn't, gentlemen. Really I couldn't. It's the way I was brought up, d'you see. As soon as someone one step above me says anything to me my heart leaps into my mouth and I can't move my tongue. No, gentlemen, you'll have to excuse me, really I couldn't!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Well that only leaves you, Ammos Fyodorovich. The master of the polished phrase. Cicero himself couldn't do better.

JUDGE. Whatever next? I ask you: Cicero! Just because I get a bit carried away sometimes about my hounds!

ALL (*urging him*). No, not just about your dogs, you can go on about anything. Don't let us down, Ammos Fyodorovich, don't desert us, be our patron! You must go first.

JUDGE. Do please leave off, gentlemen!

At this moment steps and coughs are heard from Khlestakov's room. All scramble for the door jostling one another in their anxiety to get out. Yelps are heard.

BOBCHINSKY'S VOICE. Oh, Pyotr Ivanovich, Pyotr Ivanovich! You're standing on my foot!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES' VOICE. Let me through, gentlemen, take it easy now, you're crushing me.

More yelps of "Ai!" "Oi!", finally all squeeze out and the stage is empty.

Scene II

Enter Khlestakov, alone, with bleary eyes.

KHLESTAKOV. Must have been really plastered! I wonder where they get those feather-beds, I'm dripping with sweat. My head's pounding like a gong—I reckon they must have slipped me something at dinner yesterday. It looks as if I could have quite a pleasant time here. There's nothing like hospitality, especially when it's provided out of the goodness of people's hearts and not with any ulterior motive. The Mayor's daughter's not a bad-looking crumpet, either, and even the old lady would do at a pinch... I don't know, one way and another I rather fancy this place.

Scene III

Enter Judge.

JUDGE (*stopping as he enters, to himself*). Oh my God, please help me, my knees are giving way. (*Aloud, drawing himself up and putting his hand on his sword.*) May I have the

honour of introducing myself: Collegiate Assessor and Justice of the district court Lyapkin-Tyapkin.

KHLESTAKOV. Please take a seat. So you're the local beak?

JUDGE. Appointed in 1816 for a three year term by the will of the local gentry, and I have remained in office till this day.

KHLESTAKOV. And tell me, is it a profitable business, being a judge?

JUDGE. Awarded the order of St. Vladimir, Fourth Class, after nine years of duty, with a commendation from the authorities. (*Aside.*) This money's burning a hole in my hand.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, I like the Vladimir. Far more the thing than the St. Anne, don't you think?

JUDGE (*holding his clenched fist forward a little. Aside.*) Dear God in Heaven, I feel like I'm sitting on hot coals.

KHLESTAKOV. What's that you've got in your hand?

JUDGE (*starts and drops money on the floor*). What? Er ... nothing!

KHLESTAKOV. Nothing? But isn't that some money you've dropped?

JUDGE (*shaking all over*). Oh no, sir! Not at all. (*Aside.*) Oh my God, now it's my turn to sit in the dock! I can hear the rattle of the jail-cart!

KHLESTAKOV (*picking up the money*). It is money, you know.

JUDGE (*aside*). It's all over. I'm done for now.

KHLESTAKOV. I tell you what, Judge—why don't you lend me this for a while?

JUDGE (*hastily*). Why... why ... of course! With pleasure! (*Aside.*) Holy Mother of God, get me through this!

KHLESTAKOV. I ran a bit short on the road, d'you see, what with one thing and another. But I'll send it to you as soon as I get to my estate.

JUDGE. Oh please, Your Excellency, don't give it another thought—it's a great honour for me in any case. I endeavour at all times ... to serve the authorities ... to the full extent of my abilities, weak though they may be... (*Rising from his chair, standing to attention.*) I shall not presume to trouble you further with my presence. Has Your Excellency any instructions for me?

KHLESTAKOV. Instructions?

JUDGE. For the district court?

KHLESTAKOV. Why no, I shan't be needing the district court now.

JUDGE (*exit bowing, aside*). Phew! God be praised—I've saved the day!

KHLESTAKOV (*at Judge's exit*). A nice fellow, that judge!

Scene IV

Enter Postmaster stiffly in uniform holding his sword

POSTMASTER. May I have the honour to present myself: Postmaster and Aulic Councillor Shpyokin.

KHLESTAKOV. Pleased to meet you. Nothing I like better than good company. Do sit down. Lived here all your life, have you?

POSTMASTER. That is correct, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. I must say I'm very taken with your town. Of course it's no metropolis, but what the hell! It's not the capital, is it? I say, it's not the capital, is it?

POSTMASTER. No sir, quite right, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Of course, it's only in the capital that you find the bon ton, and you get away from the provincial yokels. Isn't that so? What do you think?

POSTMASTER. Oh, quite correct, sir. (*Aside.*) He's not a bit high and mighty. Asks my opinion about everything.

KHLESTAKOV. But even so, one can be quite well off in a small town, wouldn't you say?

POSTMASTER. Oh yes, quite right, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. I mean it depends what you ask for. All one really needs is a bit of respect and some real affection—don't you think?

POSTMASTER. Exactly my own view, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. I must admit I'm glad you share my opinion. People often think I'm a bit odd, but it's just the way I am. (*Looking him in the eyes, to himself.*) Maybe this one's good for a touch, too. (*Aloud.*) You know, it's a most peculiar thing but I've absolutely cleaned myself out on the way here. Haven't a bean left. Imagine! You couldn't by any chance lend me 300 rubles, could you?

POSTMASTER. What? Why, with the greatest pleasure. There you are, sir. Very happy to be of service.

KHLESTAKOV. Most grateful. I must admit, I hate having to deny myself things when I'm travelling. Why should I, anyway? Don't you agree?

POSTMASTER. Oh absolutely, sir. (*Stands, draws himself erect and puts hand on sword.*) I shall not presume to trouble you further with my presence. Has Your Excellency any instructions to convey to the postal authorities?

KHLESTAKOV. No, no, none at all.

Postmaster bows himself out.

(*Lighting a cigar.*) That postmaster's not a bad sort of chap either. Obliging, at any rate. That's the sort of fellow I like.

Scene V

Inspector of Schools is virtually shoved into the room. A voice behind him whispers, "Get in, you coward!"

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*drawing himself up, trembling, and clutching his sword*). Have the honour to present myself: Titular Councillor Khlopov, Inspector of Schools.

KHLESTAKOV. Delighted! Sit down, sit down. Have a cigar, won't you? (*Gives him a cigar.*)

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*to himself in indecision*). Oh God! Never expected this! Do I take it or not?

KHLESTAKOV. Go on, take one, they're not bad little cigars. Not a patch on Petersburg ones, of course. I pay 25 rubles a hundred for mine. When you've smoked one you just want to kiss your hands. Here, light up. (*Gives him a candle.*)

Inspector of Schools attempts to light it and starts shaking.

KHLESTAKOV. That's the wrong end!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. (*drops cigar in fright, spits and says to himself in despair*). Oh heavens above, my cursed shyness again! Ruined everything.

KHLESTAKOV. I can see you're no connoisseur of cigars. I'm afraid they're one of my weaknesses. That and the

fair sex of course. I can't resist a pretty woman. What about you? Which do you prefer: blondes or brunettes?

Inspector of Schools is totally lost for a reply.

I say which do you prefer, blondes or brunettes?

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. I wouldn't presume to know, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. No, no. Don't evade the issue! I'm anxious to know your preferences.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Sir ... Your Excellency ... I beg to submit... (*Aside.*) God Almighty, what am I saying!

KHLESTAKOV. Ha! You won't let on. You've clearly had a tangle with some little brunette. That's right, isn't it? Own up!

Inspector of Schools is speechless.

KHLESTAKOV. Aha! You're blushing! Why wouldn't you tell me?

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. I was afraid, Your Hon... Your Ex... Your Highn... (*Aside.*) My confounded tongue's let me down again!

KHLESTAKOV. Afraid eh? Yes, there is something in my eyes that strikes fear into people's hearts. At least, I know for a fact that no woman alive is able to resist them, wouldn't you agree?

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Oh absolutely, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Do you know, it's a most peculiar thing, I'm absolutely skint. Lost the lot on the road. You couldn't lend me 300 rubles, could you?

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*delving into his pockets, to himself*). Where is it? I've lost it, I've lost it! Oh, thank heavens, here it is. (*Takes out notes and hands them over, trembling*).

KHLESTAKOV. Much obliged to you.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*drawing himself up, hand on sword*). I shall not presume to trouble you further with my presence.

KHLESTAKOV. Cheerio, then.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*aside, almost sprinting off*). Phew! Thank God for that! Let's hope that now he won't want to look at the classrooms. (*Exit.*)

Scene VI

Enter Warden of Charities, standing stiffly, hand on sword.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. May I have the honour of presenting myself, Excellency. Warden of Charities, Aulic Councillor Zemlanika.

KHLESTAKOV. How d'you do. Sit down please.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. I recently had the honour to receive you personally at the charitable institutions in my charge.

KHLESTAKOV. So you did. I remember. Splendid lunch you gave us.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. It is an honour to be able to exert oneself in the service of one's country.

KHLESTAKOV. I must admit, I have a great weakness for haute cuisine. Tell me, weren't you a little shorter yesterday?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Quite possibly. (*Brief silence.*) I never spare myself in the performance of my duty. (*Edges closer with his chair, and talks in hushed voice.*) Which is more than can be said for the postmaster here; he never lifts his finger. There are the most fearful delays in the postal service. You may feel it warrants an investigation. And the judge too, who was here just before me, he spends his whole time hunting hares, keeps dogs in the courthouse, and his private life, if I dare mention such things in your presence—and indeed I must, for the sake of the nation, for all that he may be a friend and relative of mine—his private life is simply scandalous. There's one landowner here, Dobchinsky by name—Your Excellency has met him, I believe—well, the moment Dobchinsky leaves his house the judge pops in to see his wife—it's true, I swear... And you should just see the children; not one of them looks like Dobchinsky: they're all, even the girl, the spitting image of the judge.

KHLESTAKOV. Is that a fact? I'd never have believed it!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. And as for our school inspector... I simply don't know how the authorities could have appointed him. He's worse than a Jacobin, and he fills our children's heads with such subversive ideas that I couldn't even bring myself to tell you about them! Perhaps Your Excellency would prefer me to put this down in writing?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, do that. That would be very nice. I like to have something amusing to read when I'm bored... What's your name again? My memory, you know...

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Zemlanika.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah yes! Zemlanika. And tell me, do you have any children?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Er ... yes, five, Your Excellency, two already grown up.

KHLESTAKOV. You don't say! And what are they ... er?...

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Is Your Excellency so gracious as to be asking their names?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, what are they called?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Nikolai, Ivan, Elizaveta, Maria, and Peripeteia.

KHLESTAKOV. Very nice too.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. I shall not presume to trouble you further with my presence, and to take up your time, which is designated for sacred duties... (*Bowing his way out.*)

KHLESTAKOV (*accompanying him*). No, no, not at all, what you said was most entertaining. Please come another time ... I should be delighted... (*Turns back and opening door, calls after him.*) Hey you! What did you say your name was? I didn't catch your Christian name.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Artemy Filippovich.

KHLESTAKOV. Look here, Artemy Filippovich, you won't believe this but I'm cleaned right out of ready cash. Haven't a kopeck left on me. You couldn't lend me a bit, say—er—400 rubles?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Yes, here you are.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh now isn't that a stroke of luck! I'm most obliged to you.

Exit Warden of Charities.

Scene VII

Enter Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky.

BOBCHINSKY. May I have the honour to present myself: Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky, local resident.

DOBCHINSKY. Landowner Pyotr Ivanovich Dobchinsky.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah yes, I've seen you before. You were the one who had the fall? How's the nose?

BOBCHINSKY. Oh please don't disturb yourself on my account, it's quite dried up now, thank God!

KHLESTAKOV. Dried up, has it? That's good. (*Abruptly.*) Got any money on you?

BOBCHINSKY. Money? What money?

KHLESTAKOV (*quickly and loudly*). For a loan. A thousand rubles or so.

BOBCHINSKY. Honest to God, I haven't anything like that much. What about you, Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. I haven't either, because my money, if Your Excellency is so good as to be interested, has been lodged with the Board of Public Charities.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, if you haven't got a thousand, you can give me a hundred.

BOBCHINSKY (*rummaging in pockets*). Have you got a hundred, Pyotr Ivanovich? All I've got is 40 in notes.

DOBCHINSKY (*examining his wallet*). 25 rubles, that's the lot.

BOBCHINSKY. You'd better look more carefully then, Pyotr Ivanovich! I know you've got a hole in your right hand pocket, and some may have slipped down into the lining.

DOBCHINSKY (*looking*). No, really. There's nothing there, I'm afraid.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, never mind. I'll make do with what you've got. Give me the 65 rubles. Never mind. (*Takes money.*)

DOBCHINSKY. If I might make so bold as to ask Your Excellency's assistance with regard to a rather delicate matter.

KHLESTAKOV. What might that be?

DOBCHINSKY. It really is extremely delicate, Your Excellency: you see my eldest boy, if you'll pardon the phrase, was born out of wedlock.

KHLESTAKOV. Indeed?

DOBCHINSKY. Well, that is, in a manner of speaking, you see, because he was born to me just as if it were in wedlock, if you take my meaning, Your Excellency, and then of course, as was proper, I sealed the bonds of matrimony. And so now, if you will be so good as to see what I mean, I

want him to be my son legally and to take my name, Dobchinsky.

KHLESTAKOV. Fine, let him take it! What's the problem?

DOBCHINSKY. I wouldn't have troubled you with it, but you know he's such a gifted boy, you feel sorry for him! He can recite poems already and if he ever gets hold of a penknife he can carve you a little horse and cart as quickly as any conjuror! Pyotr Ivanovich can bear me out!

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, he's a talented boy!

KHLESTAKOV. Good! Good! I'll do what I can, I'll talk to... I'll try ... I'll fix something up, yes... (*Turns to Bobchinsky.*) And have you anything to tell me?

BOBCHINSKY. Well, actually I do have one request which I humbly ask of you.

KHLESTAKOV. What is it?

BOBCHINSKY. When you return to Petersburg, I beg of you just to say to all those great people, those senators and admirals, say to them: "Your Highness, or Your Excellency or whatever it is ... in such-and-such a town there lives a man called Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky". Just tell them that: "There lives a man called Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky."

KHLESTAKOV. Very well.

BOBCHINSKY. And if you should come across His Majesty, if you could just mention to him, that ... just say: "Your Imperial Highness, in such-and-such a town there lives a man called Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky."

KHLESTAKOV. Very well.

DOBCHINSKY. Do forgive us for burdening you thus with our presence.

BOBCHINSKY. Do forgive us for burdening you thus with our presence.

KHLESTAKOV. Please don't mention it! It was a pleasure. (*Shows them out.*)

Scene VIII

KHLESTAKOV. There are a lot of officials here. They seem to have taken me for some government chappie. I suppose I did lead them on a bit yesterday. What a lot of

sheep! I must write and tell Tryapichkin in Petersburg all about it: he writes those articles, he can really go to town on this lot! Hey, Osip! bring me some paper and ink.

Osip pops head round door saying: "Right away".

Once old Tryapichkin gets his teeth into someone he really rips them to pieces. He wouldn't spare his own father for a good joke, and he likes the feel of money, too. These officials aren't a bad lot, really. Obliging with their loans, at any rate. Let's just see how much I've got: 300 from the judge, 300 from the postmaster, 600, 700, 800 ... ugh! what a filthy note! 900 .... Over a thousand! Just let me run into that double-dealing captain now. I'll teach him to cheat me.

Scene IX

Enter Osip with paper and ink.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, you oaf, you see what sort of a reception they're giving me? (*Begins writing.*)

OSIP. Yes, you can say that again! But there's just one thing, Ivan Alexandrovich.

KHLESTAKOV. What's that?

OSIP. Let's scaper. For God's sake, it's time we were off!

KHLESTAKOV. Nonsense! Why?

OSIP. I think we should, that's all. We've had a good splurge, the last two days, let's get out while the going's good. What's the point of knocking around with this lot, anyway? To hell with them, our luck might turn and someone else could arrive at any minute... For God's sake, Ivan Alexandrovich! They've got some lovely horses here—we could be off like greased lightning!

KHLESTAKOV (*writing*). No: I want to stick around a bit. Tomorrow maybe.

OSIP. Tomorrow may be too late. For God's sake, let's be off now, Ivan Alexandrovich. They may be rolling out the red carpet for you now, but the sooner we do a bunk the better. It's only because they think you're somebody else. Your old man's going to blow his top if we don't get a move on. And with these horses they wouldn't see us for dust.

KHLESTAKOV (*writing*). Oh all right. But just take this

letter along first, and you might as well order the horses at the same time. Make sure they give us good horses. Tell the coachmen I'll give them a ruble apiece if they drive like the wind! And sing songs! (*Continues writing.*) Just wait till Tryapichkin reads this. He'll die laughing...

OSIP. I'll get one of the men here to take it, sir, while I get on with the packing, so we don't waste any time.

KHLESTAKOV (*writing*). Very well. Only get me a candle.

OSIP (*exit, off*). Hey, listen, you! Take this letter down to the post-office when it's ready and tell the postmaster he's to take it without money. And tell them to send round the best troika—and the guvnor won't pay for that either: tell them it's official. Now step on it, or His Lordship will do his nut. Wait—the letter's not finished yet.

KHLESTAKOV (*still writing*). I wonder where he's living now—Post Office Street or Gorokhovaya? He also likes changing his address frequently—without paying the rent. I'll take a chance on Post Office Street. (*Folds and addresses it.*)

Osip brings a candle. Khlestakov seals letter. Voice of Derzhimorda heard saying: "Where do you think you're going, fuzz-face? I've got orders not to admit anybody."

KHLESTAKOV (*gives letter to Osip*). Here, take it.

SHOPKEEPERS (*off*). You can't keep us out, we've come on business. It's urgent. Let us in, officer.

DERZHIMORDA (*off*). Off with you! Go on, beat it! He won't receive you, he's asleep.

Noise increases.

KHLESTAKOV. What's that noise, Osip? See what it is, will you.

OSIP (*looking out of window*). It's some tradesmen who want to come in, and the copper won't let them. They're waving bits of paper: seems they want to see you.

KHLESTAKOV (*going to window*). Well, my friends, what can I do for you?

SHOPKEEPERS (*off*). We appeal to you, Your Lordship. Allow us to present a petition.

KHLESTAKOV. Let them in, let them in! Osip, tell them they can come in.

Exit Osip.

(*Receives petitions through the window, opens one of them and reads:*) "To His Most Noble Eminence the Lord High Financier from the shopkeeper Abdulin..." There's no such title. What the devil's all this about?

Scene X

Enter Merchants with basket of wine and sugar loaves.

KHLESTAKOV. What can I do for you, friends?

SHOPKEEPERS. We humbly beg your noble favour!

KHLESTAKOV. Well, what's the problem?

SHOPKEEPERS. Don't ruin us, sir! Deliver us from our yoke of unjust oppression.

KHLESTAKOV. Who's oppressing you?

ONE OF THE SHOPKEEPERS. It's all the Mayor's doing, sir. There never was a mayor like him, your lordship. The foul things he does—you wouldn't believe it. He'll be the ruin of us with all the soldiers he billets on us. The way he treats us! He pulls our beards and calls us Tartars. Honest to God! As if we didn't show him proper respect! But we always do our duty: a little bit of cloth for a dress for his wife and daughter—we've got no objection to that. But that's not enough for him, oh no: he comes into the shop and takes the first thing he claps eyes on. He sees a piece of cloth and says: "Ah, my dear chap, that's a nice bit of cloth: send it round to me, will you?" So we send it, and there goes the best part of 50 yards of material.

KHLESTAKOV. You don't say! What a scoundrel!

SHOPKEEPERS. Scoundrel's the word! You have to hide everything away when he comes into the shop. He's not at all particular, either: he'll take any old rubbish! Prunes that have sat in the barrel for 7 years, that even my assistant wouldn't touch, and he eats them by the handful. We give him all sorts of presents on his name day, St. Antony's, but he's not content with that and tells us he's having another name day, on St. Onuphrius's. Which means more presents.

KHLESTAKOV. Why, the man's a proper rogue!

SHOPKEEPERS. Aiee, aiee! And if you say a word he'll billet a whole regiment on you. Or he'll lock you up in your

own house. "I can't have you flogged," he says, "I can't have you tortured—that's against the law, but this way I can put you on a diet of salt herrings!"

KHLESTAKOV. The man's a monster! He could go to Siberia for less than that!

SHOPKEEPERS. Siberia or further—anywhere you choose to send him, so long as it's far away from us. Now Your Honour, please accept this humble token of our hospitality, just a little sugar and wine.

KHLESTAKOV. Good heavens no! I wouldn't dream of it. I never accept bribes. But if you offered to lend me 300 rubles, for instance, that would be quite a different matter. Loans I can accept.

SHOPKEEPERS. By all means, good father! (*They take out money.*) But why only 300? Better still, take 500, but do please help us.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh well, if you insist. It is only a loan, after all...

SHOPKEEPERS (*hand money to him on a silver tray*). And won't you take the salver with it?

KHLESTAKOV. Well, I don't mind if I do.

SHOPKEEPERS (*bowing*). And please take some sugar as well, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. No, no, I never take bribes...

OSIP. Oh go on, take it, Your Excellency. You never know when you might need a bit of sugar on the road. Here, I'll take it—the loaves and the package. Yes, give me the lot. What's that there? A piece of string? Give it here, a bit of string always comes in handy. If the carriage falls apart or something, you can tie it up again.

SHOPKEEPERS. Please look kindly on our plea, your Grace. If you won't help us, then we don't know what will happen, we might just as well stick our heads in the noose!

KHLESTAKOV. Rest assured, good people! I'll do everything I can.

Exeunt shopkeepers. Woman's voice is heard: "Now don't you dare stop me! I'll lodge a complaint against you. Stop shoving me, you're hurting." Who's that? (*Goes to window.*) What's the matter, woman?

VOICES OF TWO WOMEN. Have mercy, father, I beg you! Hear my plea, Your Lordship.

KHLESTAKOV. Let her in.

Scene XI

Enter Locksmith's wife and Sergeant's widow.

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE (*bowing deeply*). Have mercy on us...

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. Have mercy on us...

KHLESTAKOV. Well, good women, who are you?

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. Ivanova, Your Worship, widow of Sergeant Ivanov.

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Fevronya Petrovna Poshlyopkina, Your Honour, wife of locksmith Poshlyopkin...

KHLESTAKOV. Wait, one at a time. What's the problem?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Have mercy, father: I've got a complaint against the Mayor! May God rot his soul! And may his children, and his own thieving self, and his uncles and aunts all rot in hell!

KHLESTAKOV. What has he done?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. He had my husband conscripted even though his turn hadn't come up, the swine! And he can't be called up by law; anyway: he's married.

KHLESTAKOV. Well then, how could he do it?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. He can do it, the scoundrel, and he did it—may God damn him to eternal hell! May he, and his aunt, if he's got one, come to a bad end, and if his father's still alive I hope he also kicks the bucket, the scoundrel, or snuffs it good and proper! He was supposed to take the tailor's son, who's a drunkard anyway, but his parents gave him an expensive present, so he went after the shopkeeper Panteleyeva's son, and Panteleyeva sent three bolts of cloth to his wife, so he moves on to me. "What do you need your husband for?" he says, "he's no use to you." That's for me to say, whether he's any use or not, the scoundrel! "He's a thief," he says, "he may not have stolen anything yet, but he will do sooner or later, and next year he'll be conscripted anyway." But how am I supposed to manage without my husband, the swine? I'm weak, the rogue! I hope none of his family ever see the light of day again! And if he's got a mother-in-law, I hope his mother-in-law...

KHLESTAKOV. All right, all right. And what about you? (*Showing locksmith's wife out.*)

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE (*making her exit*). Please don't forget, good father! Be merciful!

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. It's about the Mayor, Your Honour...

KHLESTAKOV. Well, what is it? Why've you come to see me? And keep it brief.

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. He had me flogged, as God's my witness, he did.

KHLESTAKOV. How come?

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. It was all a mistake, Your Worship. Some peasant women were quarrelling in the market, and the police didn't get there till it was all over and they had to arrest someone so they just grabbed me. And the Mayor had me thrashed, I couldn't sit down for two days.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, so what do you want me to do about it?

SERGEANT'S WIDOW. Of course there's nothing can be done about it now. But you could make him pay me some damages. I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth and a spot of cash would come in very handy just at the moment...

KHLESTAKOV. Very well then. I'll see to it, run along now.

Exit Sergeant's Widow. Hands clutching petitions are thrust through the window.

What the devil's going on now? Not another lot of them? (*Goes to window.*) No, go away! I don't want them! Take them away, for God's sake. (*Moves away.*) I'm sick to death of them! Don't let them in, Osip.

OSIP (*shouts through window*). Go away! Scram! That's the lot for today! Come back tomorrow!

Door opens to reveal a figure in a frieze coat, unshaven, with a swollen lip, and bandaged cheek. Behind him others are visible in perspective.

Where do you think you're going? Beat it! (*Thrusts back the first of them, pushing him by the stomach. Exit with them, slamming the door behind himself.*)

Scene XII

Enter Maria Antonovna.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh!

KHLESTAKOV. Did something give you a fright, mamselle?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. No, nothing.

KHLESTAKOV (*putting on airs*). I am indeed flattered, mamselle, to think that you should have thought me the sort of man who... May I ask where you were going?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I wasn't going anywhere, really.

KHLESTAKOV. And for what particular purpose were you not going anywhere?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I was wondering if mama might be here.

KHLESTAKOV. No, but I'm curious to know why exactly you should be going nowhere?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I'm being a nuisance, keeping you from your important affairs.

KHLESTAKOV (*posturing*). No affair could be more important to me than the sight of your eyes. You a nuisance? You couldn't be a nuisance ... if you tried; on the contrary, you can bring me pleasure.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. That must be the way they speak in Petersburg.

KHLESTAKOV. What other style would suit so exquisite a creature? May I give myself the happiness of offering you a chair? What am I saying? You deserve a throne.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I don't know really. I ought to be going. (*Sits.*)

KHLESTAKOV. What a beautiful scarf you're wearing.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh! You city folk always make fun of us provincials.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh that I were that scarf, that I might wrap myself so close around your lily-white neck.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I just don't know what you're talking about. A scarf?... What extraordinary weather we're having today!

KHLESTAKOV. Your lips, mamselle, are much more extraordinary than any weather.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh, you do say such things! I want to ask you to write some verses in my album. I'm sure you know a lot of verses, don't you?

KHLESTAKOV. Your wish, signorina, is my command. What sort of verses would you like?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh, any sort—just something good, and new.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah yes, verses! I know so many.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Well tell me which ones you'll write for me.

KHLESTAKOV. Why bother? I can remember them without reciting them.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. But I do so love poetry.

KHLESTAKOV. I know so many different kinds. Well, if you insist... how about this: "Say not the struggle naught availeth... The strife is fierce, the battle long..." That's one of mine, you know, and there are lots more, only I can't quite call them to mind now. Anyway, to get to the point. What I want to tell you is that when I gaze into your eyes (*moves his chair closer*) the love...

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Love! I don't understand what that is... I've never known what love means... (*Moves chair away.*)

KHLESTAKOV (*moves chair*). Why do you move away? It's much more comfortable to sit close together.

MARIA ANTONOVNA (*moves away*). Why sit close together, when it's the same further away.

KHLESTAKOV (*moving closer*). But why be further apart, when it's the same to sit together.

MARIA ANTONOVNA (*moves away*). But what's all this about?

KHLESTAKOV (*moving closer*). It's all in the mind, you see. You only think we're close: just imagine that we're far apart instead. Oh what bliss, mamselle, if I could enfold you in my arms and press you to me.

MARIA ANTONOVNA (*looking out of window*). What was that bird that just flew past? Was it a magpie?

KHLESTAKOV (*looks out of window*). A magpie, yes. (*Kisses her on shoulder*). A magpie.

MARIA ANTONOVNA (*jumps up in indignation*). Now that's really too much!... What nerve!...

KHLESTAKOV (*restraining her*). Forgive me, dear lady, it was love, the purest love that made me do it.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. You must take me for a real country yokel... (*Attempts to leave.*)

KHLESTAKOV (*continues to restrain her*). No, it was love, I swear to you. I only meant it in fun. Forgive me, Maria Antonovna, please forgive me! I'll go down on my knees to beg your forgiveness. (*Drops to his knees.*) I beg you to forgive me. You see, I'm on my knees.

Scene XIII

Enter Anna Andreyevna.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA (*seeing Khlestakov on his knees*). Goodness gracious!

KHLESTAKOV (*rising*). Damnation!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA (*to her daughter*). Well, young lady, what's the meaning of this? What kind of behaviour is this?

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Mama, I...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Leave the room, do you hear! this instant! And don't dare show your face in here again.

Exit Maria Antonovna in tears.

I must say, I am surprised, Your Excellency.

KHLESTAKOV (*aside*). She's quite a tasty morsel, herself... Hm ... not at all bad. (*Throws himself on his knees.*) Madame, you must know that I'm consumed with love.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What are you doing on your knees? Dear me, do please stand up—the floor's not at all clean!

KHLESTAKOV. No, on my knees ... I must be on my knees. I have to know what is to be my fate—whether life or death.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Forgive me, but I'm afraid I don't quite take your meaning. Are you making some sort of declaration about my daughter?

KHLESTAKOV. No, no, it's you I'm in love with—you! My life hangs by a thread. If you don't requite my undying love I shall be unworthy of earthly existence. With my bosom aflame I ask for your hand.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But then you see, I am—to some extent, that is ... a married woman.

KHLESTAKOV. Why, that doesn't matter! True love knows no boundaries. The heart is a law unto itself, as Karamzin says. Together we'll flee—to the shade of a distant brook ... your hand, I beg you, your hand!

Scene XIV

Maria Antonovna suddenly rushes in.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Mama, papa says you're to... (*Seeing Khlestakov on his knees, shrieks.*) Goodness gracious!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Why you ... well ... what do you think you're doing? Little flibberty-gibbet! Dashing in here like a scalded cat! And what are you so surprised about? I can't think what nonsense you've got in your head. Nobody would think you were really eighteen. You're just like a child of three. When are you going to learn a bit of sense and start behaving like a properly brought-up young lady? When will you learn the rules of good conduct?

MARIA ANTONOVNA (*through her tears*). Mama, really, I didn't know...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. You never know anything, that's your trouble, featherbrained nit-wit! You're no better than those Lyapkin-Tyapkin girls. Why you always have to copy them, I can't imagine. There must be better examples you can find. Take your mother, for instance.

KHLESTAKOV (*grasping Maria's hand*). Anna Andreyevna, I beg you not to stand in the way of our happiness. Give your blessing to our constant love!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA (*astonished*). I don't... You mean it's *her*?

KHLESTAKOV. Tell me at once. Is it life? ... or death?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Now look what you've done, you little fool. All because of you, silly little baggage, our distinguished guest goes down on his knees in front of me and you come dashing in like a mad thing. I ought to say no by rights. I ought to refuse my consent: you're not worthy of such, happiness.

MARIA ANTONOVNA. I won't do it again, Mama, really I won't.

Scene XV

Enter Mayor, breathless.

MAYOR. Mercy, Your Excellency! Spare me! Don't ruin me!

KHLESTAKOV. Now what's the matter?

MAYOR. The shopkeepers have been complaining to Your Excellency. Not half of what they say is true, I give you my word of honour, they're liars and cheats, the lot of them. And the sergeant's widow who said I had her flogged, she's lying too, I swear to God: she flogged herself.

KHLESTAKOV. To hell with the sergeant's widow—what do I care about her!

MAYOR. Don't believe them, Your Excellency. They're just a pack of liars ... any child could see through them. The whole town knows that they're outright liars. And as for swindling, allow me to inform you: that lot are swindlers such as the world has never seen before.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. I don't think you're aware of the honour Ivan Alexandrovich is doing us? He's asking for our daughter's hand in marriage.

MAYOR. What? Have you lost your mind, woman? You don't know what you're saying. Please don't be angry, Your Excellency: she's a little soft in the head. Just like her mother.

KHLESTAKOV. But it's true. I am asking for her hand. I love her.

MAYOR. Your Excellency ... I can't believe it.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But he's telling you.

KHLESTAKOV. I'm quite serious... My love for her could make me lose my mind.

MAYOR. I daren't believe it, I'm unworthy of such an honour.

KHLESTAKOV. But if you do not give your consent I shall not be responsible for my actions.

MAYOR. I can't believe it: Your Excellency is having a little fun?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Oh you great gawk! Listen to what the gentleman's telling you, can't you?

MAYOR. I can't believe it.

KHLESTAKOV. Your consent, your consent! I'm a des-

perate man, I'll do anything: when I shoot myself you'll find yourself in court.

MAYOR. No, no please! I'm innocent, innocent in body and soul. Please don't be angry. I beg you to do as Your Excellency pleases. I can't think straight. My head's in a whirl...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well, go on, give them your blessing.

Khlestakov brings Maria Antonovna to the Mayor.

MAYOR. May God bless you both, but I'm innocent, I swear.

Khlestakov kisses Maria Antonovna. Mayor looks on.

What the devil? Well, I never! (*Wipes his eyes.*) They're kissing each other! Dear God, they're kissing each other! It's true, they're engaged! (*Shrieking and jumping for joy.*) Aiee Anton! Aiee Anton! This is your lucky day!

Scene XVI

Enter Osip.

OSIP. The horses are ready.

KHLESTAKOV. Er, right ... I'll be there in a minute.

MAYOR. I say, Your Excellency, you aren't leaving, are you?

KHLESTAKOV. Er, yes, I'm just off.

MAYOR. But, did you not ... I mean ... did Your Excellency not mention something about er, a wedding?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh that, yes ... I shan't be a minute ... a day or two, to see my uncle, you know, a rich old boy... Be back tomorrow.

MAYOR. Of course. We would not presume to delay you and we look forward to your safe return.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes. Of course. I'll be right back. Goodbye, my love... Oh ... Oh ... words fail me! Farewell, my darling! (*Kisses her hand.*)

MAYOR. Will you be needing anything for the road? Your Excellency was—er—a little short of money?

KHLESTAKOV. What gave you that?... (*Thinking a moment.*) Ah, well, perhaps, yes, a little.

MAYOR. How much would you be needing?

KHLESTAKOV. Well, let's see, you lent me 200, I mean

400—I don't want to take advantage of your mistake—so, shall we say the same again, to bring it up to a round 800?

MAYOR. Certainly! (*Takes money out of wallet.*) What's more, all in nice brand-new notes.

KHLESTAKOV. So they are. (*Examining money.*) Isn't that nice. They say new notes bring new luck, don't they?

MAYOR. They do. Indeed.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, cheerio, Anton Antonovich! Many thanks for all your hospitality. I must say, I've never had such a good reception anywhere else before. Farewell, Anna Andreyevna! Farewell my darling, Maria Antonovna.

Exeunt. Voices heard off.

KHLESTAKOV. Farewell, my angel, Maria Antonovna.

MAYOR. What's all this? Surely you're not travelling in the post-chaise?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, that's how I always travel. Springs give me a headache.

COACHMAN. Whoa!

MAYOR. Well at least have something to spread on the seat. If you like I'll get you a rug?

KHLESTAKOV. No, what for? It doesn't matter. Though I suppose you could give me a rug.

MAYOR. Hey, Avdotya! Go to the store-room and get the best rug, the one with the blue ground, the Persian one. And run!

COACHMAN. Whoa!

MAYOR. When are we to expect Your Excellency?

KHLESTAKOV. Tomorrow or the day after.

OSIP. Ah, is that the rug? Here, put it like this! Now let's have a bit of hay on that side.

COACHMAN. Whoa!

OSIP. No, this side! Here, a bit more! Good! That'll be just fine! (*Pats rug.*) Now, will Your Honour be seated?

KHLESTAKOV. Cheerio, Anton Antonovich!

MAYOR. Goodbye, Your Excellency!

WOMEN. Goodbye, Ivan Alexandrovich!

KHLESTAKOV. Cheerio, mother!

COACHMAN. Giddyup, my beauties!

Ringing of bells.

Curtain.

ACT V

Scene I

Mayor, Anna Andreyevna and Maria Antonovna.

MAYOR. Well, Anna Andreyevna, how about that, eh? Never imagined anything like that, did you? A fine rich catch, dammit! Beyond your wildest dreams, isn't it? One moment you're just any old mayor's wife, the next—damn it all!—you're mother-in-law to a fine young devil like that...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. On the contrary; I saw it coming all along. It may seem incredible to you, because you're just a bumpkin, who's never mixed with decent people before.

MAYOR. I'm a decent person myself, I'll have you know. No, but just think, Anna Andreyevna, we're birds of a quite a different feather now, eh? Flying high we are now, damn it all! Oho just you wait, I'm going to make it sticky for those toads, those snakes in the grass with their petitioning and informing. Hey, you out there!

Enter Svistunov.

Ah, Svistunov—get out there and fetch those shopkeepers, there's a good fellow. I'll teach that pack of Jews! I'll teach them to complain about me. This time, my little doves, you're going to get something to complain about! Up to now I've only had you by the whiskers: wait till I get hold of your beards! I want the name of every single person who came complaining about me, and every one of those scribbling rats that wrote out their petitions. And make sure the whole town, every man jack of them, knows how God has chosen to honour me, that I'm marrying my daughter not to some common louse, but to a man such as the world has never seen before, a man who can do anything! Anything! Shout it from the rooftops, ring the bells till they crack, this is your Mayor's great day!

Exit Svistunov.

So what about it, Anna Andreyevna? Where do you want to live then? Here or in St. P?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. In St. Petersburg, of course! You don't imagine one could stay on here!

MAYOR. If you say St. P, St. P it shall be. Mind you, it

wouldn't be too bad here, either. Expect I'd have to chuck in being mayor, eh, Anna Andreyevna?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Naturellement! What does being mayor matter?

MAYOR. Hey, Anna Andreyevna, do you think I might land a plum job in Petersburg? You never know, with him being a crony of all those ministers, and calling at the palace, I might end up a general. Eh, what about that, Anna Andreyevna? Do you think I'll get to be a general?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. I should certainly hope so!

MAYOR. Ehey! Me a general! Complete with sash and all. What sash do you prefer, Anna Andreyevna, the red or the blue?

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. The blue, of course.

MAYOR. Hey, listen to that! Nothing wrong with the red, either. You know the great thing about being a general? Suppose you want to travel somewhere: couriers and adjutants gallop on ahead—"The best horses you have! Here comes the General!" All those councillors, captains, mayors just sit and wait and wait for horses and you don't give a brass tack. Off to dine with the governor and some mayor leaps to his feet when he sees you—ha, ha, ha! (*Doubles up with laughter.*) That's the great thing about it, damn it!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. It's always the coarse things that appeal to you. You'll have to bear in mind that our life is going to be completely different now. No more riff-raff like this lot for your friends. No more dog-crazy judges for you to go hunting with, or Zemlanikas. You're going to mix with counts and society people, the crème de la crème. And to tell you the truth, I'm not sure how you'll manage, sometimes you come out with a word which you'd never hear in the beau monde.

MAYOR. So what? Words can do no harm.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Yes, things are fine so long as you're mayor—but life there's completely different.

MAYOR. It certainly is! They have these two fish dishes there—jellied eels and smoked sturgeon—that make your mouth water just to look at them!

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Huh! Fish—that's all he cares about! But I shall want to have the best house in the capital, and when you come into my room there'll be such an exquisite aroma you'll have to shut your eyes tight. (*Screws eyes shut and sniffs.*) Ah, that's wonderful!

Scene II

Enter Shopkeepers.

MAYOR. Ah, there you are, my little lambs!

SHOPKEEPERS (*bowing*). We wish you health and happiness, Your Honour.

MAYOR. Well, and how are my little doves? How's business, eh? Well, my thumb-on-the-scales twisters, pound-of-flesh merchants, make complaints about me, would you? The arch diddlers, the master fiddlers, the prize-winning swindling rogues, decide to complain? So where's it got you now? Thought you'd get me in jug, did you? The devil take your filthy rotten souls to hell...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Anton! Really, what language!

MAYOR (*snaps at her*). Never mind my language! I've got news for you: that Government Inspector you ran whining to is going to marry my daughter. Well? What do you say now? Now I'll ... wait till I get my hands on you! Cheating innocent people... Making contracts with the treasury only to diddle it out of a hundred thousand by supplying rotten old cloth, and then you make a generous donation, you swine, of fifteen yards, and expect a decoration for it? If they ever found out, they'd give you what for... Fancy yourselves, don't you: "I'm a shopkeeper, you can't touch me, I'm as good as any gentleman." Why, a gentleman—you snoutfaces—a gentleman studies the sciences; maybe they do whip him at school but at least he learns some manners. But you! You're born thieves and you get beaten by your masters because you can't cheat properly. You're giving short change before you can say the Lord's prayer; and as soon as your paunch fills out and your pockets start to bulge you think you're God Almighty, just because you can swill down sixteen samovars of tea a day. Well, you're not, and this time I'm going to show you once and for all.

SHOPKEEPERS (*bowing*). We're very sorry, Anton Antonovich.

MAYOR. Complain about me, would you? And who was it let you charge 20,000 for the timber for the bridge when the stuff was worth less than a hundred? Eh? It was me, wasn't it, goat-beard? Wasn't it? Forgotten, have you? I only have to say the word, and it'll be off to Siberia for you. Hear that, eh?

ONE OF THE SHOPKEEPERS. Honest to God, we're sorry, Anton Antonovich. The devil led us astray, Your Honour. We swear we'll never complain again. Please don't be angry with us—we'll do anything you say.

MAYOR. Yes, it's "don't be angry with us" now, isn't it? Crawling and grovelling! Because I'm on top. But if things had gone just a little more your way, you'd have trodden my face into the mud, you swine, and dumped logs on top of me for good measure.

SHOPKEEPERS (*bowing deeply*). Don't ruin us, Anton Antonovich!

MAYOR. Yes, "don't ruin us" you say now, but what were you saying before? I'd like to take you all and... (*Waves his hand.*) Well, I hope God forgives you! That's all I can say! Luckily for you I'm not a vindictive man, but just watch out from now on! I'm not giving my daughter away to any old nobleman, so make sure you come up with some decent wedding presents, d'you hear? And don't think you'll get away with your usual pickled herrings and head of sugar, either! Now beat it.

Exeunt Shopkeepers.

Scene III

Enter Judge and Warden of Charities.

JUDGE (*still in doorway*). Are we to believe the rumours, Anton Antonovich? That an extraordinary piece of good fortune has come your way?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Allow me to congratulate you on your extraordinary good fortune. I was genuinely overjoyed when I heard the news. (*Goes up to kiss Anna Andreyevna's hand.*) Anna Andreyevna! (*Kissing Maria Antonovna's hand.*) Maria Antonovna!

Enter Rastakovsky.

RASTAKOVSKY. Congratulations, Anton Antonovich! May God grant you and the happy couple a long life and may He multiply your posterity with grandchildren and great-grandchildren! Anna Andreyevna! (*Kissing Anna Andreyevna's hand.*) Maria Antonovna! (*Kissing Maria Antonovna's hand.*)

Scene IV

Enter Korobkin, his wife, and Lyulyukov.

KOROBKIN. Sincerest congratulations, indeed, Anton Antonovich! Anna Andreyevna! (*Kissing Anna Andreyevna's hand.*) Maria Antonovna! (*Kissing Maria Antonovna's hand.*)

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. My sincerest congratulations, Anna Andreyevna, on your new happiness.

LYULYUKOV. Allow me to congratulate you, Anna Andreyevna! (*Kisses Anna Andreyevna's hand and then, turning to the audiences, tuts and waggishly shakes his head.*) Maria Antonovna! My congratulations! (*Kisses her hand and casts spectators same look.*)

Enter large number of guests in tails and frock-coats who first kiss Anna Andreyevna's hand, saying "Anna Andreyevna", then Maria Antonovna's saying "Maria Antonovna". Enter Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, colliding in doorway.

BOBCHINSKY! Allow me to offer you my sincerest congratulations.

DOBCHINSKY. Anton Antonovich, allow me to offer you my sincerest congratulations.

BOBCHINSKY. On your extreme good fortune.

DOBCHINSKY. Anna Andreyevna.

BOBCHINSKY. Anna Andreyevna.

They both bend over Anna Andreyevna's hand together and bump their foreheads.

DOBCHINSKY. Maria Antonovna! (*Kisses her hand.*) Allow me to offer you my sincerest congratulations. You will experience happiness beyond description and waft about in gold and silver dresses and drink the most ravishing soup and spend your time most pleasantly.

BOBCHINSKY (*interrupting*). Allow me to congratulate you, Maria Antonovna. I wish you riches beyond measure and masses and masses of rubles and a little baby boy no bigger than this (*demonstrating*)—so he'll sit in the palm of your hand! And he'll have a lusty voice, the little scamp—Wah! Wah! Wah!

Enter several more guests, who kiss the ladies' hands, and Inspector of Schools and wife.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Allow me to offer you...

HIS WIFE (*rushing up*). My congratulations, Anna Andreyevna! (*They kiss.*) I was simply overjoyed, let me tell you. "Anna Andreyevna's daughter has got engaged" they said. "Goodness me!" I thought, and I was so thrilled I said to my husband, "Have you heard about Anna Andreyevna's stroke of luck?" "Goodness," I thought, "thank heavens!" And I said to him: "I'm so excited I simply can't wait to see Anna Andreyevna..." "Goodness me", I thought, "Anna Andreyevna's been hoping to find her daughter a good match, and this is exactly what she wanted." And my dear, I was so overjoyed that I couldn't speak. I was crying, tears just streaming down my face. And Luka Lukich says: "But why on earth are you bawling, Nastinka?" "Lukanchik," I said, "I really don't know", and the tears were just coming down in torrents.

MAYOR. Please, ladies and gentlemen, do be seated. Hey, Mishka, bring some more chairs.

The guests seat themselves.

Scene VII

Enter Chief of Police and Constables.

CHIEF OF POLICE. Allow me to congratulate you, Your Excellency, and wish you many long years of prosperity!

MAYOR. Thank you, thank you! Please be seated, gentlemen.

Guests sit down.

JUDGE. Well, aren't you going to tell us how it happened, Anton Antonovich? Describe the course of events, eh?

MAYOR. It was an extraordinary course of events: His Excellency saw fit to make the proposal himself...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. What's more, in the most charming and delicate way. I just wish you could have heard the way he said it. "Anna Andreyevna," he said, "it's out of a deep respect I have for your virtues." Such a handsome, well-bred gentleman, with the noblest principles! "I assure you, Anna Andreyevna, my life is not worth a kopeck, I'm doing this only through esteem for your rare qualities".

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Oh Mama, you know he said that to me.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Silence, girl, mind your own business! "Anna Andreyevna", he said, "I am struck with wonder" ... Oh, he slowered me with such flattering compliments and when I was about to say, "But we cannot presume to hope for such an honour", he suddenly fell on his knees in front of me and said in the most aristocratic way, "Anna Andreyevna, tell me you reciprocate my feelings or I shall have to put an end to my life."

MARIA ANTONOVNA. Really, Mama, he was saying that about *me*.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Well, maybe it was about you as well, I never said it wasn't.

MAYOR. He had us really alarmed, you know. Said he was going to shoot himself. "I'll shoot myself, I'll shoot myself," he said.

MANY OF THE GUESTS. You don't say!

JUDGE. Well I never!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. It's the proper course of destiny!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Destiny, my elbow! It's the just deserts of true service. (*Aside.*) It's the biggest pig who gets first to the trough!

JUDGE. I'd be quite prepared to sell you that puppy now, Anton Antonovich, the one you were inquiring about before.

MAYOR. I've no need for puppies now.

JUDGE. Well if you don't want that one perhaps you'd like to consider another one.

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. My dear Anna Andreyevna, I'm so happy for you, you simply can't imagine!

KOROBKIN. But where, if I might ask, is our distinguished guest at the moment? Didn't I hear he'd left town?

MAYOR. Yes, he's just gone off for a day on some extremely important business.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. To his uncle to seek his blessing.

MAYOR. Yes, to seek his blessing; but tomorrow he'll be ... (*Sneezes*).

Loud clamour of "bless you".

Thank you! But he'll be back to... (*Sneezes.*)

Clamour. Various voices can be heard above the general din.

CHIEF OF POLICE. Very good health to Your Honour!

BOBCHINSKY. A hundred years and a sack of gold coins!

DOBCHINSKY. May God prolong your years to 40 times 40!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. I hope it chokes you!

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. God rot you!

MAYOR. Thank you, thank you. And the same to you, all of you.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Of course we shall be moving to Petersburg now. Here, you know, the air's so ... I have to say it ... so provincial. It really is most disagreeable. And my husband ... of course ... will become a general.

MAYOR. Yes, gentlemen, I must confess I rather fancy being a general, dammit!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Please God they make you one.

RASTAKOVSKY. To God all things are possible.

JUDGE. Big ships need deep waters.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. And honour is paid to true service.

JUDGE (*aside*). Making him a general is like putting a saddle on a cow! No, my brother, you've got a long way to go yet. There's plenty of others ahead of you with far cleaner copy-books.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*aside*). Look at that—appointing himself general already! You never know, he may just get there. He's pompous enough, that's for sure. (*Turns to Mayor.*) You won't forget us then, will you, Anton Antonovich?

JUDGE. If there was any sort of trouble around here, you'd stick up for us, wouldn't you?

KOROBKIN. I'll be taking my boy to Petersburg next year to enter him into state service. Can I count on your giving him a helping hand and acting as father to the poor little orphan, for my sake?

MAYOR. I shall do all that lies within my powers.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. You're always much too ready to make promises. Anton. You'll have no time for that sort of

thing. And anyway, why should you burden yourself with such promises?

MAYOR. Well, why not, my sweet, I might occasionally have time.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. Even if you did, you can't go around offering helping hands to every Tom, Dick and Harry.

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. Hear how she denigrates us? She's always been like that.

LADY GUEST. Set a pig at a table and it'll put its trotters on it.

Scene VIII

Enter Postmaster breathless, clutching an unsealed letter.

POSTMASTER. I say, everyone—most extraordinary thing. The man we thought was a government inspector was no such thing.

ALL. What do you mean, no such thing?

POSTMASTER. He's not a government inspector at all, it's all revealed in this letter.

MAYOR. What? What d'you mean? What letter?

POSTMASTER. This letter. He wrote it himself. It was like this: they brought this letter down to the post office, I look at the address and it says "Post Office Street". I was petrified. That's it, I thought, he's found something wrong with our postal department and he's sent in a report. So I took it and opened it.

MAYOR. How could you do such a thing?

POSTMASTER. I really don't know myself, I was impelled by some supernatural force. I was just on the point of calling the courier to send it off by special express delivery, but I was overcome with a curiosity such as I've never felt before. Just couldn't hold myself back. Couldn't do it. In one ear I can hear a voice telling me: "Don't open it—it's more than your life's worth!" and in the other some devil keeps on whispering: "Go on, open it up!" The sealing wax was fair burning a hole in my hand—but when I opened it I felt myself freeze, honest to God. My hands trembled and my head started to swim.

MAYOR. But how dare you open the mail of such a powerful, important personage?

POSTMASTER. But that's the whole point! He's not at all powerful, or important. He's not even a personage!

MAYOR. Well, what is he then, according to you?

POSTMASTER. He's just a nobody ... a little squirt, that's all.

MAYOR (*angrily*). How dare you call him a nobody, a little squirt, how dare you? I'll have you arrested.

POSTMASTER. Who, you?

MAYOR. Yes, me.

POSTMASTER. You haven't got the authority.

MAYOR. You are clearly not aware he is to marry my daughter and consequently I shall be a dignitary myself and I shall pack you off to Siberia!

POSTMASTER. I'd forget about Siberia if I were you, Anton Antonovich. Siberia's a long way from here! I think I'd better read you the letter. Shall I read the letter, ladies and gentlemen?

ALL. Yes, yes, read it!

POSTMASTER (*reads*). "Old boy Tryapichkin, I just must write and tell you the incredible things that have been happening to me. On my way out here I was completely fleeced by an infantry captain, and so I was stranded, and on the point of being chucked in jail by the innkeeper, when suddenly, on account of my Petersburg clothes and looks, the whole town started taking me for some Governor-General. And so here I am at the Mayor's, living off the fat of the land, flirting away with his wife and daughter—the only trouble being I can't decide who to go for first ... maybe I should begin with the mother, because she looks the accommodating type... Remember that time when we were both down on our luck and that café owner threw me out on my ear because I charged my pies to the King of England? It's quite a different tune here, I can tell you! They all lend me as much money as I want. You'd kill yourself laughing—they're such a bunch of cretins. You write those literary titbits, you should stick this lot in a story. Take the mayor for instance, as thick as two planks..."

MAYOR. Rubbish, you're making it up.

POSTMASTER (*showing letter*). Read it yourself then.

MAYOR (*reads*). "...as thick as two planks." It's impossible! You wrote it yourself!

POSTMASTER. How do you think I could have written it?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Read on!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Yes, go on, read it.

POSTMASTER (*continues*). "The mayor, for instance, as thick as two planks..."

MAYOR. You don't have to repeat it, damn you. It was quite bad enough the first time.

POSTMASTER (*continues*). ...Mm ... mm ... mm "two planks. The postmaster's quite a character, too..." (*Stops reading.*) He says something rather rude about me, too.

MAYOR. Go on, read it!

POSTMASTER. Why should I?

MAYOR. Because it was your bloody idea to read it in the first place, that's why! Read it all!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Give it here, I'll read it. (*Puts on spectacles and reads.*) "The postmaster's the spitting image of old Mikheyev, our night-watchman, and I should imagine he drinks like a fish, too, the scoundrel."

POSTMASTER. Young whippersnapper! He should be flogged.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*continues reading*). "As for the so-called superintendent of charitable insti... insti..." (*Stammers.*)

KOROBKIN. Why have you stopped?

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. The ... er ... handwriting's pretty hard to read... Anyway it's quite clear that's he's a thorough rogue.

KOROBKIN. I'll read it, my eyes are better than yours. (*Grabs letter.*)

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*holding on to letter*). No, we can skip this bit, it gets legible again lower down.

KOROBKIN. Here, I'll read it.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. No, I will; it's quite legible further on.

POSTMASTER. Oh no, you don't. You read the whole thing, we've been reading it all.

ALL. Give it to him, Artemy Filippovich, give him the letter. (*To Korobkin.*) You read it, Ivan Kuzmich.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. All right, here you are then.

(*Hands over letter.*) We've got to here... (*Covering part of letter with thumb.*) Read from here.

All crowd round.

POSTMASTER. No, nonsense now, you read the lot.

KOROBKIN (*reads*). "Superintendent of charitable institutions, one Zemlanika, looks like a pig in a wig."

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. It's not even witty! A pig in a wig, I ask you, who ever heard of a pig in a wig!

KOROBKIN (*continues*). "The inspector of schools simply reeks of garlic from morning to night."

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS (*to audience.*) What nonsense! I've never eaten garlic in my life!

JUDGE (*aside*). Well thank God he's said nothing about me, at any rate.

KOROBKIN (*reads*). "And the judge..."

JUDGE. Damnation! (*Aloud.*) Honestly, gentlemen, this letter's far too long. Damned tedious listening to all this rubbish.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Oh no!

POSTMASTER. Oh no! Read on.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Oh no! Just keep on reading.

KOROBKIN (*continues*). "And the judge, Lyapkin-Tyapkin, is most decidedly ... movay ... tone..." (*Stops.*) Must be a French word.

JUDGE. But what the devil does it mean? Bad enough to be called a crook, but that may mean something worse!

KOROBKIN (*carries on reading*). But on the whole they're not a bad lot, hospitable too. Cheerio for now, Tryapichkin, old sport, I've decided to follow your example and take up literature. It's a real bore living like this, there's no getting away from it, you've got to have food for the soul. One simply has to concern oneself with higher things. Write to me in Saratov, Podkatilovka village. (*Folds letter and reads address.*) To the Honourable Ivan Vasilievich Tryapichkin Esq., St. Petersburg, Post Office Street, No. 97, third floor, first on the right."

ONE OF THE LADIES. What an unexpected debacle!

MAYOR. Now I'm done for, good and proper. It's all up with me, now! I can't see ... all I can see is a mass of pig's

snouts, instead of faces, just pig's snouts... Bring him back! Bring him back! (*Waves arms about.*)

POSTMASTER. No chance! Just to make things worse I told the foreman to give him the fastest horses we've got and as if that wasn't enough I went and gave him a priority warrant!

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. My, what a to-do!

JUDGE. And the devil of it is, gentlemen, that I lent him 300 rubles.

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. So did I.

POSTMASTER (*sighs*). So did I.

BOBCHINSKY. And Pyotr Ivanovich and I lent him 65 in notes, so we did.

JUDGE (*spreading his hands in consternation*). But how did it happen? That's what I want to know. How did we come to make such asses of ourselves?

MAYOR (*striking his forehead*). How could I be such an idiot? I must be going soft in the head! 30 years I've been in the service and there's never been a shopkeeper or contractor could get the better of me; I've outsmarted the sharpest crooks, I've hooked sharks and foxes wily enough to rook the entire human race. I've hoodwinked three governors! Governors! (*In disgust.*) And that's not the half of it...

ANNA ANDREYEVNA. But this is impossible, Anton, he's engaged to our Masha.

MAYOR (*enraged*). Engaged! A fig for your engagement! (*In desperation.*) All right. Look at me. Look, just look, every man jack of you, look up and see the Mayor, just see what a fool he's made of himself! Fool! Halfwit! Imbecile! (*Shakes fist at himself.*) Blockhead! Taking that pup, that little squirt for a brass hat. Think of him now trumpeting it all down the highway! He'll spread the story to the four corners of the earth! I shall be the laughing stock of the country. And then some hack, some penny-a-liner will come along and stick us all in a comedy. That's what I can't take! They'll spare nothing! Take no notice of rank, or reputation, anything for a cheap laugh and a snigger in the stalls! What are you laughing at? You're laughing at yourselves, that's what!... You, eugh! (*Stamps with rage.*) I'd like to get my hands on those scribblers! Penpushers! Dirty liberals! Grass-snakes! I'd trample over the lot of you, grind you down to powder and scatter you to the four winds! (*Swiping his fist and pounding the floor with*

his heel. After a brief silence.) I still can't think straight. When God punishes someone it seems he takes away his reason first. Was there anything about that guttersnipe that remotely resembled a government inspector? Nothing! Not even one little finger! and suddenly it's all "the government inspector", "the government inspector"! So who first got it into his head that he was a government inspector? Tell me that!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES (*spreading his arms.*) I couldn't say for the life of me how it happened. Some fog must have got into our minds.

JUDGE. I'll tell you who started it! They started it, those two smart alecks! (*Pointing at Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky.*)

BOBCHINSKY. No, it wasn't me. I never dreamt of it.

DOBCHINSKY. I never said a thing!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. It was them! Of course it was them.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. So it was. They came scampering in here from the inn like a pair of lunatics shouting: "He's here, he's here already, he's not spending any money! That's him all right". A prize rabbit you caught!

MAYOR. It had to be you, didn't it? The town gossips and scandalmongers!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Damn you both to hell! And your inspector with you!

MAYOR. Running round town the whole time panicking everyone, blathering magpies!

JUDGE. Gibbering monkeys!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS. Fatheads!

WARDEN OF CHARITIES. Potbellied runts!

All crowd round.

BOBCHINSKY. As God's my witness it wasn't me, it was Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. Oh no, Pyotr Ivanovich, it was you who started it...

BOBCHINSKY. Oh no, it wasn't, it was you, you said it first...

Final Scene

Enter Gendarme.

GENDARME. A government inspector has arrived by Decree of the Tsar from St. Petersburg. He demands that you attend him immediately at the inn.

Everyone is thunderstruck by these words. An exclamation of astonishment is uttered simultaneously by the ladies, the entire company suddenly shifts position and is turned to stone.

Dumb scene

The Mayor stands like a pillar in the middle, his arms outstretched, his head thrust back; to the right are his wife and daughter, arrested in motion towards him, next in line is the Postmaster, contorted into a quesion mark, facing the audience; next comes the Inspector of Schools with a look of naïve bewilderment; at the very edge of the stage stand three ladies, leaning against one another with the most satirical expression on their faces, clearly directed at the Mayor's family; to the left of the Mayor is the Warden of Charities, his head cocked to one side, as if listening for something; next to him is the Judge, arms outstretched, squatting almost on the floor, his lips pursed as if to whistle, or to say "Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish!"; next to him stands Korobkin, facing the audience, his eyes screwed up and a look of contempt on his face directed at the Mayor; at the edge of the stage stand Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, their arms stretched out towards each other, their mouths wide open, their eyes popping out at one another; the other guests are merely turned into pillars: the petrified company retains this disposition for almost a minute and a half.

Curtain

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